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THE STORIES OF THE KINGDOM

A STUDY OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

BY
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"THE SCHOOL OF JESUS," "THE SONG OF THE EXCELLENT WAY,"
"THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP," ETC.

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended for those who wish to study for themselves the stories which Christ used in His spoken ministry.

Believing that a satisfactory understanding of the parables can be reached only by relating each and all of them to the central purpose of Christ's teaching—the Kingdom of God—I have arranged them with a view to keeping that relationship always before the reader. There is, inevitably, overlapping in the scheme : some of the stories form a link between the ideas of the preceding section and that in which they are placed and others cover wider aspects of the Kingdom than their particular section-heading suggests. In every case the position assigned has reference to what seems to me the main truth conveyed by the story.

We have no means of deciding whether any of the parables with a "human interest" do or do not relate literal facts. We do not know whether the Tale of the Lost Sons was a bit of family history known to Jesus ; nor can we tell whether He ever

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met some person who had been wounded on the Jericho Road and succoured by a Samaritan. I do not see that it concerns us greatly. Dr Jacks has said that Jesus' method consisted in fixing people's attention on some of the innumerable details of common life in which eternal values are revealed. That seems to me a very true saying, and I have tried to keep it in mind.

Unless we observe the cardinal principle of relevancy we shall meet with little success in the study of the parables, and I would like to reiterate what has been said by other adventurers in this field—that two sets of things may have the same mutual relations though there is no resemblance between the things themselves. For example, the shepherd and the sheep may give a beautiful picture of the relations of our Lord and His folk; but if likenesses between Christians and sheep are to be insisted upon in every direction the figure will soon become merely ludicrous. Resemblance misleads when we depart from the essential *relation* which is the ground of the comparison instituted by a parable. This is what is meant here by the principle of relevancy.

Readers familiar with the subject will recognize my indebtedness to a goodly company. Some are referred to in the text. Students who have access to Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* will often find

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helpful matter under headings suggested by the subjects of the various parables and the special article on "parables" by Plummer, vol. iii. pp. 662f., deals very ably with the many problems involved. Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* may be similarly used with advantage. *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ*, by Dr A. B. Bruce, gives much detailed study and helpful exegesis. For the Lucan parables Dr Plummer's volume on Luke in the International Critical Commentary is useful. A modern translation of the New Testament, Moffatt or Weymouth, should be consulted continually.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Rev. Hugh Martin and the Rev. J. R. Coates for some most helpful suggestions.

G. R. H. SHAFTO.

WESTMINSTER, 1922.

Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,
Deep-seated in our mystic frame,
We yield all blessing to the name
Of Him that made them current coin ;

For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,
Where truth in closest words shall fail,
When truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors.

And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought ;

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef.

In Memoriam, xxxvi.

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THE STUDY OF THE PARABLES.

THE parables of Christ occupy a sure place in the library of the world's literary masterpieces. We know them so well that it may be not unprofitable to begin our study by a brief résumé of familiar facts. Insufficient allowance for some of these facts is made at times and it will be well to keep them clearly before our minds.

HOW THE PARABLES HAVE REACHED US.

The New Testament is a translation from Greek into English ; but it is from the Greek of the East, not the Greek of the West. It is in large part the Greek of men who thought in their native Aramaic ¹ though they wrote in Greek. So far as the Gospels are concerned, much of it, including all with which we are at present concerned, is a record of things said in Aramaic to Jewish audiences living in Palestine in the first century of our era.

For this we must make allowance continually or misunderstandings will creep in. To take a simple illustration : John the Baptist's denunciation of his contemporaries as a " generation of vipers " sounds

¹ Perhaps they translated from an Aramaic original.

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more scathing than it really was simply because to us "viper" is a term of abuse. It was not so in his day. John's hearers were men who knew that the stubble was set on fire each year before the ploughing; most of them had seen it done and had watched the snakes that lurked in the undergrowth writhing away before the approaching flames. They heard no unkind emphasis in the epithet of "viper"; but the blazing stubble flaming after the creeping things was a vivid picture for them of the "wrath to come."

OUR ENGLISH VERSIONS.

This New Testament has been several times translated into English, and King James' version has long been recognized as one of the standard classics of our literature. We do not always realize what three centuries have done to our English Bible. The flux of time has made some words archaic and they are no longer in common use. That is, comparatively, a small matter. More serious is the fact, so often disregarded, that the emphasis and even the meaning of innumerable words and phrases has changed; so that much of its phraseology is remote from the speech and writing of to-day. In 1611 it was infinitely nearer and more attuned to the life of the time. The Authorized Version is a rich treasure-house of pure and perfect English for every scholar and its literary value is beyond all computation and all praise. But, when one remembers the supreme and avowed purpose of its contents (see, for example, John xx. 31), it is obviously more important that everybody should

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know what it is *about* than that everybody should have an available source of pure and perfect English.

We are extremely conservative about the Bible ; we go on printing it with an almost complete disregard of the changed conventions of the printer's craft. Publishing, which has progressed so marvelously from the unpunctuated script of the ancient copyist, has halted, so far as the Bible is concerned, with its early seventeenth-century achievements as a final model. We have consented to the use of modern founts of type, but beyond that, little concession has been made to modern ideas. The typographic skill, the "display" and "setting-out" that is at the disposal of any twentieth-century storyteller who adventures into print is withheld from those documents which are the classics of the Christian faith.

THE DISADVANTAGE OF FAMILIARITY.

Paradoxical though it may seem, the Bible suffers at the same time from the opposite extreme of familiarity. It is not a new book. We have heard its words, its phrases are familiar ; the flow of its sonorous periods is one to which our ears have become accustomed. Stevenson has described this better than I can do :

"Familiarity has a cunning disenchantment ; in a day or two she can steal all beauty from the mountaintops ; and the most startling words begin to fall dead upon the ear after several repetitions. If you hear a thing too often you no longer hear it. . . . The whole Bible has thus lost its message for the common

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run of hearers ; it has become mere words of course ; and the parson may bawl himself scarlet and beat the pulpit like a thing possessed, but his hearers will continue to nod ; they are strangely at peace ; they know all he has to say ; ring the old bell as you choose, it is still the old bell and it cannot startle their composure."

Most of us have probably been convicted of the truth of this at the bar of our own experience.

Barriers such as these and the ever-widening breach of the centuries thrust themselves between us and the magical appeal of Jesus, the Teller of Stories. The record of His tales, told in Aramaic, was made by men of no great literary pretensions in a language other than their own ; they knew more of it as a spoken language than as a literary vehicle and they wrote largely in the style and idiom of everyday speech, making the good news of Jesus a People's Book rather than a scholar's treatise. Their work has passed through the hands of countless copyists who blundered from time to time ; it has been translated and retranslated into our English : yet all these processes with their inevitable compression and their blurring of the fine lines of the original draughtsmanship, have failed to obscure the perfect, unstudied art of the Narrator of the parables. They have, however, made it necessary for us to look carefully for it—carefully and thoughtfully, as one has to learn to appreciate the art of some Old Master whose achievement hangs in a famous gallery.

If Jesus of Nazareth were to step from His century into our twentieth century, if He were to come from His Syrian home to tell English-speaking people of

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God as He spoke of Him to His compatriots, doubtless His talks would be full of popular appeal; He would tell enchanting stories in our vernacular and the common people would hear Him gladly. But our Lord does not so come. We have to work out our own salvation.

THE METHOD OF PARAPHRASE.

We have to take these stories of Syrian life and society, stories that are so far from us in many ways, and realize how near to us they are in actual life. We have to read them thoughtfully, which means that, consciously or unconsciously, we re-express them in our own vocabulary. A paraphrase of the various parables is given here, to be read in conjunction with the Authorized or Revised Versions, and to be considered merely as explanatory of their translations. A paraphrase is, of course, in no sense a translation, and all that need be said in explanation of many of the expansions of the narrative is that toll has been taken of the scholarship which has in many ways rediscovered our New Testament, and that much has been embodied to save the reader the annoyance of textual comments that would otherwise be inevitable. If the colloquial and unliterary style jars upon anyone's susceptibilities, let it be remembered that the comparison of the vocabulary and syntax of New Testament Greek with contemporary non-literary remains—bills, proclamations, account-books, contracts, memoranda, private letters, popular inscriptions and so forth—justifies our looking upon the original text of the

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Gospels as something homely and warm, a People's Book rather than a treasure of classic literature.

These variations on the theme need not mar its music for us ; and if they send one reader back to the familiar version with a new sense of the vivid quality of some well-known tale, the offence of homely words will be condoned. A change of the angle of approach may give a vision of something long sepulchred in a stately and familiar phrase—a real Eastertide if the Living Word becomes alive for evermore.

But our study to be profitable must seek to know and fulfil the Parabolist's original intention. It cannot content itself with the interest of historical research or of imaginative reconstruction. Every story either has or has not its timeless message. If we are to "hear Him" we must hear what He has to say *to us* ; we must find the imperishable quality of the story which has preserved it from the fate of perishable things ; we must discover what is its appeal—if any—to our age and civilization.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* "The Parabolist's original intention." What was the purpose of Jesus ? Find His own words which describe His mission.

* Is it possible for us to be in any sense members of His audience ? Imagine the setting of the Sower parable. Find yourself a place in the crowd : take some stock of your neighbours ; make a description of six of them.

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* Imagine a similar crowd in England to-day : first, a countryside crowd ; what people would be in it ? second, a town crowd and its constituents. Would they hear Jesus gladly ?

“ The perils of familiarity.” But we cannot know the stories too well, surely ? Do we know them just because we know the words ? Think about this rather carefully.

* “ A People’s Book rather than a scholar’s treatise.” Discuss the essential differences, and tabulate some conclusions as to methods which disciples should adopt to-day to spread their Master’s message.

* NOTE.—In all the “ Helps ” an asterisk is affixed to those that are most suitable for circle-discussion.

THE TELLER OF THE PARABLES.

THE study of the parables is an attempt to understand the mind of Christ. Since every true teacher communicates himself, the right understanding of his teaching includes a better understanding of the teacher. This is so true of Jesus that the Fourth Evangelist describes Him as "the Word": He is not only the messenger but the message—the living Word that "became flesh and dwelt among us."

We may ask concerning any parable, What does this story mean? or we may ask, What does Jesus mean by this story? Obviously, the right answer to the second question will be the most satisfactory answer possible for the first. To know what was the intention and purpose of the Narrator is more important than to know what explanations of the narrative the learning of expositors has to offer. An explanation may be most ingenious without exposing the purport of Jesus in the least.

Let our first concern, then, be to make clear to ourselves the direction in which we are seeking to progress. We are not setting out to analyse "earthly stories with heavenly meanings," nor are we attempting to build up elaborate interpretations of the details of each story until it has become a complicated analogy of a whole lot of other things, nor are we going to discuss fables by a master Fabulist in order to discover the exact and appropriate moral

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to be tacked on to each one of them. We are going to look for His meaning every time. The parables are for us essentially revelations of the Parabolist : in them we seek for discoveries of "the mind that was in Christ Jesus." We hope to profit most by studying them from this standpoint.

Let us think, then, of Jesus in connection with His stories. He is the Maker of the parables—the Story-teller. Let us forget, or put aside for the moment, the fact that we have ever beheld His glory, emboldened so to do because for our sakes He deliberately laid aside that glory. We will think of Him as a Master-artist, skilled in word-magic, who can paint an unforgettable picture in a sentence and tell to a chance-drawn crowd a story that will for ever hold its own among the world's literary masterpieces.

THE MIND OF THE MASTER.

Note how He achieves the lucid simplicity of a master-artist because His mind thinks *things* and not abstractions. His is a mind so logical that instinctively He goes to the world of facts in order to teach fact. Everything is so real to Jesus that it lives as He speaks of it. As Kipling said (in another connection) :

"His words became alive and walked up and down in the hearts of his hearers."

His own spiritual experiences take to themselves dramatic form and the account of the temptation in the wilderness, for example, has all the fascination

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of "I will tell you the Story of What Happened to me out There." Reality is so vividly present to Jesus that telling His thoughts to the people is just making a succession of sketches, gay or tender, ironic or sympathetic, humorous or wistful—and always poignant and compelling.

He discusses the greatest problems of life in terms of the homeliest things—the savour of salt, the fermentation of wine, the impossibility of building securely on sand, the quaint humour of a lighted lamp put under a basket, of a ploughman with his back to the furrow, of an unarmed thief attacking a well-defended house, of a householder leaving his premises open to the thief. Right and wrong are not discussed as abstract propositions but in little pictures of the broad and narrow way, of wise and foolish builders, of good and bad trees, of trying to be a slave at the beck and call of two masters at the same time, of the single eye and the evil eye, of sheep and goats. The central and sacred truths of faith are for ever set forth, with a divine simplicity, in the homely symbols of food and drink—the Bread and the Wine.

All the conversations of Jesus are made luminous by the play of fancy, the quick and pointed application of practical things.

"He spoke of lilies, vines, and corn,
The sparrow and the raven ;
And words so natural yet so wise
Were on men's hearts engraven :
And yeast, and bread, and flax, and cloth,
And eggs, and fish, and candles—
See how the old, familiar world
He most divinely handles."

THE TELLER OF THE PARABLES

The verse emphasizes the fact that the parable is an essential characteristic of the mentality of Jesus. We shall come most profitably to the consideration of those specific stories and illustrations of His which are classed as parables if we keep in mind that they represent Jesus' own mental attitude and outlook. He speaks to life, from life, and in terms of life.

THE MASTER-ARTIST.

Jesus is the Story-teller whose tales stilled the clamour of the *bazar*, whose arrival in the village market-place filled it with an excited, eager throng. The folk gathered round Him as children gather round when fairy-tales are told. He could hold the absorbed attention of His fellow-guests at a dinner ; He could beguile the tired travellers in a village *khan* to forget the heat and dust and weariness of the long day's travel.

If we could see Him and hear Him He would do these things for us.

But do we ever see Him ? Do we ever hear Him speak ? Even though we resolutely thrust aside conventions that obscure our vision, there are other mists than those of time and alien speech. Jesus was a Syrian, and not a scholarly Englishman. All His backgrounds are Oriental and His rich colours at times glow strangely under our colder skies.

We ought at least to give such patient study to His pictures as is needed to appreciate the masterly simplicity of a Japanese artist's flower-spray. His stories are no rare jewels meticulously cut and set with cunning craftsmanship to display their beauties,

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but “gems of purest ray serene,” secreted without effort by a mind that thought in pictures. They so impressed His contemporaries—no mean judges of the story-teller’s art—that they exclaimed, “Never man spake like this man !”

They are well-known stories to us. It is taken for granted that they are very wonderful ; so they are in some danger of being treated as masterpieces which ordinary folk can neither understand nor enjoy, though they know that it is the correct thing to speak of them as masterpieces. These pictures in words were wrought by their Maker, not that they might be the prized and priceless possessions of an intellectually wealthy few, but that they might adorn humble homes and make beautiful simple lives. Their flawless art at times reveals no far-reaching didactic purpose—though their timeless truth makes them immortal—but simply the Teller’s sheer delight in perfect narrative. They were a natural means of self-expression to Him. We must learn to think of the artist in our Lord ; must look for and appreciate the sheer joy of self-expression which is part of all creative work.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote of the joy of God in the sunrise ; of that eternal youth of the creative power which never wearies to “do it again.” It is a joy to be looked for in all true art ; Kipling has called it the “joy of the working,” and it is to be found in all the world’s masterpieces. If we have failed to see it in the stories of Jesus it is a call to look again !

In any real appreciation of the parables there must be some recognition of the joy in self-expression

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which is an essential element in all good work. If we cannot hear His voice we must learn to recognize Him in this way in the stories He tells.

THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF CHRIST.

The parables afford examples of the breadth and sanity of Christ's outlook on life, of His mental grasp and of His many-sidedness. There is a healthy balance in His point of view; nothing is dwarfed, nothing is exaggerated. He "sees life steadily and sees it whole." Orthodox piety knows, of course, that this is so and is impatient that anyone thinks it necessary to mention it; it is something to be taken for granted, implied by His Divinity. All this is correct enough but rather lazy—perhaps mental laziness is the easily-besetting sin of piety! If Jesus is worth knowing, He is worth knowing as completely as possible and we must summon all our faculties to the task. To take anything because it is an article of belief too often means losing the vision which comes to those who keep these things and ponder them in their hearts.

Notice, then, how the Master's mind looks all round, sees the varied aspects of truth as one approaches it from different points of view. It is because of this that some people find His teaching too paradoxical to be expounded or applied to practical life. The Gospels abound in examples and they are dealt with in considerable detail in J. A. Findlay's *Jesus As They Saw Him*, pp. 117ff.¹ We can find

¹ The whole of the first chapter in this second part of Professor Findlay's book is full of valuable side-lights on the parables.

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an immediate illustration in the triad of sentence-parables occasioned by the neglect of formal religious observances with which the disciples were charged (Mark ii. 18-22). The defence is a plea of incongruity, the picture, that of the inappropriateness of guests fasting at a wedding festival; the thought then takes a larger sweep to include the inappropriateness of all joyless things to Christianity, and finally the impossibility of the inappropriate is viewed from both standpoints; the antiquated system would be brought to dissolution by any attempted renovation with the new; the new system itself would be injured and lost by any combination with the old.

We shall have occasion to note how helpful in this respect is the complementary character of the first and third Gospels; and how the difference in their temperaments has led to one expressing the very aspect of some truth which the other has missed.

This quickness and comprehensiveness of our Lord's mind, His way of looking at all sides of the question and of insisting that His followers should do so, make a very real demand upon us for intellectual loyalty in place of mere acquiescence.

There is a passage in Ruskin's *Frondees Agrestes* worth pondering in this connection :

"The first and noblest use of the imagination is to enable us to bring sensibly to our sight the things which are recorded as belonging to our future state, or invisibly surrounding us in this. It is given us . . . above all, to call up the scenes and facts in which we are commanded to believe, and be present, as if in the body, at every recorded event of the history of the Redeemer."

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The way is still open for disciples to go to the Master saying, Explain to us the parable; and in a very real sense Jesus Himself is the only reliable expositor. "The words of the wise are . . . as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies"; and whilst the words of Jesus (whom Matthew delights to identify with the Divine Wisdom) are, to use Peabody's phrase, "the Permanent set in the frame of the Occasion," our concern is with their permanent teaching. From this we must not allow any interests, literary or antiquarian, to divert our attention or our study.

We may think of Jesus as a speaker consciously looking round for illustrations to enforce His lessons, but it is a truer interpretation of the "mind that was in Christ Jesus" to say that for Him the law of association always worked directly and unerringly, converting all things to messengers of God's thoughts. Common things so apprehended were full of holiest significance. The lighted candle in the one-roomed cottage, its beams shining a welcome through the open door; the farm-worker scattering his seed, garnering his harvest, or weeding his holding; a woman baking a loaf, or patching an old garment; the fishermen drawing their net to shore; the birds, the flowers, the foxes, the sky, the great caravan route with its multifarious life—all these were influences that moulded His thought, touched chords in that vibrant spirit whence came unforgettable music; for His spirit was always "in tune with the infinite," with the heart of His Father.

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Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Take a little trouble to identify the many references to imagery used by Jesus in this section.

Find parables that exemplify (a) the simplicity of His art ; (b) His use of contrast ; (c) His instinct for unity ; (d) His power to indicate a character with a sentence.

* Collect examples from the parables showing how the Master's mind considered the same truth from different aspects, so that He "saw all round a thing."

* Find four examples of the principle of contrast, as exemplified by the *characters* described in parables.

* The last paragraph of the section suggests that life's commonplaces may be sanctified by a use of the Law of Association. Discuss this with arguments for and against.

* What does "imagination" connote in the quotation from Ruskin? Have all men imagination? Is there a duty of use?

"The business of the Christian conscience is to claim the world of fact as its kingdom and inheritance."—*F. Henderson*.

"Our business is to speak Things."—*Oliver Cromwell*.

"It is well to have visions of a better life than that of every day, but it is the life of every day from which the elements of a better life must come."—*Maeterlinck*.

* Discuss the implications of these three quotations in the light of the section just studied.

THE PARABOLIC METHOD.

[BEFORE reading this section the reader is advised to study Matt. xiii. 10-17, 34, 35, with the parallel passages from the second and third Gospels, Mark iv. 10-13, 22, 25, 33, 34 and Luke viii. 9, 10, 17, 18. A desirable form of study would be to make a careful complete statement including the various points noted by each Evangelist.]

“Parabolic method” is really too academic a phrase, for it tends to obscure the naturalness with which a mind in harmony with God expresses itself in winsome forms. We will let it stand because there is a very definite and deliberate use of a form of presentment that was likely to attract even the most uninterested among His hearers.

WHICH ARE THE PARABLES ?

The general truth, that Jesus sought to win men by an attractive presentation of His message, is sometimes obscured by the fact that the word “parable” is used rather arbitrarily. It is not easy to understand why certain word-pictures should be called parables whilst others that come apparently in the same category are not. Why, for instance, in Matt. xiii. do we include in all lists of parables the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Price and the Drag-

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net (verses 44-48) and exclude the Wise Householder (verse 52)? Most writers have attempted definitions; and all the definitions fail to account for the custom of limiting the term to about thirty of the utterances of Jesus. Indeed, it is not easy to find two authorities on the subject whose lists of the parables are identical. Archbishop Trench in his classic work, *Notes on the Parables*, deals with thirty stories. Another classic on the subject, Dr Bruce's *Parabolic Teaching*, does not include the Rich Fool; but he deals at some length with the Children of the Bride-chamber, the Children in the Market-place, and the Unfaithful Upper Servant, none of which are found in Trench's work. Of those which are usually included, Dr Marcus Dods omits the Seed Growing Secretly, the Friend at Midnight, and the Pounds. Some lists include the Lamp on the Lampstand, the Fighting King, the Rash Builder, the Strait Gate, and the Sheep and the Goats.

The word "parable" is used by Jesus Himself of some utterances which are never included among the parables (*e.g.* "Now from the fig-tree learn her parable," Matt. xxiv. 32; "this parable, Physician, heal thyself," Luke iv. 23). Matthew and Mark both report that the disciples asked for the meaning of the "parable" when Jesus had been talking about the things which defile a man (Matt. xv. 16; Mark vii. 17). As a matter of fact, the words "parable" and "proverb" are to a large extent used interchangeably in the Gospels. The Synop- tists always use the former word in both meanings (*cf.* Luke iv. 23; v. 36. These we should to-day describe as proverbs). In John's Gospel the word

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which is the Greek title of the Book of Proverbs is always used (cf. John xvi. 25, 29), even when it is quite a discourse, such as that of the Shepherd and the Sheep (John x. 6).

We have even better reason for using the term in a fairly elastic sense. It is quite possible that many of the "tabloid" tales, which are mere references to the point of some analogy, are abbreviations of stories Jesus told. The Mote and the Beam, the Two Builders, the Watchful Porter, the Strait Gate and the Narrow Way are possible examples—though the last, I believe, is an allusion to the roads to Jehoshaphat's Gate and the Vale of Hinnom and the track to St Stephen's Gate. The treatment on a later page of the parable of the Pounds as a Tale of King Archelaus may perhaps serve as an example of the kind of conjecture necessary to recover some of these stories.

Altogether there are about sixty metaphors and figures in the words of Jesus recorded in the Synoptics; a proportion of these may fairly be considered either parables in germ or memoranda of stories originally told at greater length. The Johannine parables or allegories are of a different type; they deal almost exclusively with the nature, person, works and relationships of the Christ. This is sufficient to differentiate them from the parables of the accepted lists, which deal with man's spiritual nature and career. It is worthy of note that Papias professed to have received by tradition other of the Lord's parables which he recorded in *An Account of the Lord's Sayings*—one of the lost books of the Church.

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CLASSIFICATION OF THE PARABLES.

Many different schemes have been proposed and some account of them may be consulted in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* (iii. 164). A chronological arrangement would seem simple, but the notes of time are not always very clear and are sometimes lacking altogether. Bishop Westcott and others have attempted classifications according to the nature of the figures used ; others have attempted arrangement according to subject-matter (*e.g.* Bruce's three divisions of theoretic, evangelic and prophetic parables). Most of these distinctions emphasize the difference of accent between the first and third Evangelists : Matthew's parables are largely concerned with Divine Government, Luke's with human conduct. The temperamental distinction between the two men may be seen if Matthew's Story of the King's Son's Marriage (xxii. 1ff.) is compared with Luke's Story of the Great Supper (xvi. 16ff.). If we assume that Matthew and Luke had access to some common memoranda of the sayings of Jesus the distinction becomes more noteworthy.

Mr E. S. Woods (*Studies on the Parables of Christ*) has a good working classification according to subject-matter. The one offered here attempts to indicate more precisely the main themes of the stories, but, inevitably, there must be some overlapping between the divisions. (See the Preface.)

HOW THE PARABOLIC METHOD WORKS.

The quotations from Matthew with the parallel passages from Mark and Luke referred to at the

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beginning of this section form a well-known crux of exposition. The sentences may be punctuated in various ways, yielding varieties of meaning; interpretations are still more varied. When all has been said the differences between the Synoptists are not easily harmonized. Mark and Luke read as though our Lord's object in speaking in parables was to keep the mass of the people in ignorance—though this is somewhat contradicted by the sayings they go on to record. Matthew's "*because*" in place of "*that*" and his "*do*" in place of "*may*" removes much perplexity, making it plain that Jesus refers to a common attitude of wilful ignorance; to the way in which people reject all teaching that means any change in their own heart and life.

It is Matthew, too, who says that this was a reply to a question from the disciples as to why Jesus used the parabolic method; and that Jesus justified the use of fictitious characters and incidents on the ground that people must be made to think and that art is the only way by which people can be taught.

In Matthew's account the disciples ask why parables are used and are congratulated upon their quickened spirit of interest and inquiry: in Mark they ask the meaning of the parables and are rebuked for their dullness in not seeing it for themselves.

One thing is certain: we must try to understand the words in terms of the Speaker—as we should do in the case of any other man whose words we desired to appraise correctly. It is quite inconceivable that Jesus the Seeker and Saviour, Jesus Who consistently proclaimed God's universal Fatherhood, Whose aim and prayer was that men should know that Father

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as the true and only God, would deliberately adopt a method of proclamation which was calculated to leave a proportion of His hearers in the dark as to His real meaning.

Without producing antiquarian reasons it is surely fairly obvious that the true purpose of a "mystery" is not to conceal but to make known. The alleged secret sign of the freemasons is (one may reasonably suppose) not for the purpose of concealing the fact of masonic initiation from the outsider but to reveal that fact to other freemasons. "Those that are without" know that Jesus is announcing the Kingdom; His understanding intimates know that He is bringing it in—that He is the Advent, the small seed, the sown corn of wheat. This is the purport of Jesus' use of the figure of the lighted lamp in Mark iv. and His conclusions therefrom.

"Nothing is so secret or hidden that we should not try to discover it. God's purpose for all secrets is that they should be discovered. Just think that over and lay it to heart. But take care what you listen to, and how. You will receive benefit from teaching according to the attention you give to it, and even more. For the man who has proved himself able to receive some teaching can and will receive more: but the man who is unable to receive any will lose even the little knowledge which all have to start with" (Pym, *Mark's Account of Jesus*, p. 12).

Another certainty is that one whose insight into human hearts was so sure, whose intuitions were so unerring ("He needed not that any should tell Him; for He knew what was in man," John ii. 25), would

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not ignore the fact that there were people whose prejudices and preconceptions would make them deaf to His meaning.

He knew, then, that His teaching would be *selective* in its effects upon His hearers—as all good teaching is, inevitably. The association of the words with the Story of the Sower and the Varying Soil suggests that the supreme quality He sought for in His hearers was *receptiveness*, and that prejudice or impenetrability are the results of man's own conduct, not of God's purpose. All this amounts to saying that the Teacher seeks scholars, that we must be teachable, "become as little children," and keep our minds open—receptive, that is—if we would learn of Him.

THE EXPOSITION OF THE PARABLES.

Stories which translate abstract truths into concrete instances stimulate thought, and by so doing they sift the listeners at once. They also further sift the listeners and discriminate those who seek the Speaker's thought from those who imagine confirmations of their own foibles. When Vitringa explains the Pearl of Great Price as the church of Geneva and the doctrines of Calvin, or the Unmerciful Servant as the Pope of Rome it is easy to diagnose his theological prepossessions but not quite so easy to accept his exposition.

Tertullian in an earlier day dealt with the type of exposition that searches for minute analogies in details and is finally landed in inconsistencies which obscure the Master's intention. He describes a

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man concerned with the parable of the Lost Coin who wants to know why ten pieces of silver ; what is the meaning of the broom ; and what the lighted candle signifies. (If he had had to do with later products of that same type he would have had to add, Why a woman ? What does the house typify ? For whom do the friends and neighbours stand ?) His reply is the sensible one that it is by these details the picture is built up in the hearer's mind and the lesson conveyed that the Teacher desired.

“ In all great sermons there is one central truth conveyed.” This is also true of all great works of art. As every story Jesus told is a masterpiece in its own sphere, we may expect to find some central lesson, which the details serve in greater or less degree to elucidate. The story will convey the truth, but not necessarily the whole truth ; for Jesus Himself frequently presents other aspects of the same truth by other stories. We must remember the number of varying stories which begin “ The Kingdom of Heaven is like——” At the same time, the truth conveyed will have its applications in many spheres, and related truths will be exemplified by the plot or details of a good story.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

A parable is, literally, something “ thrown alongside ” something else. Show that this applies to the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. xxv.).

* Fuller describes parables as “ Not unlike the pillar

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of cloud and fire which gave light to the Israelites but was a cloud of darkness to the Egyptians.” Consider and criticize this.

Make a story for a little child of Matt. vii. 3-5, with the Carpenter’s shop as background. If you do your work satisfactorily the child will see the point and the humour of the story.

* What does “receptiveness” cover? What are its allied qualities and some of its immediate consequences?

* Is it true that good teaching is “selective”? Assuming that the quality of Christ’s teaching was all right, account for the fact that, whilst “the common people heard Him gladly,” the majority of the leaders of the day were hostile.

STORIES OF GOD'S KINGDOM: THE KINGDOM OF RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS.

I. HOW THE KINGDOM IS FOUND.

1. THE STORY OF THE TREASURE-FINDER.

Matt. xiii. 44.

2. THE STORY OF THE PEARL-SEEKER.

Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

THE STORY OF THE TREASURE-FINDER.

God's Kingdom is like a hoard of treasure which someone has buried in a field. It lies there for years, unknown to anyone, and when a man by chance comes across it he quickly covers it up again and, full of joy at his find, goes to sell all that he has to buy that field (Matt. xiii. 44).

THE STORY OF THE PEARL-SEEKER.

God's Kingdom is like a merchant who seeks continually for choice pearls. Such a man when he found at last a wonderful pearl of high price went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matt. xiii. 45, 46).

THE Kingdom of God—Matthew's Jewish training prompts him to avoid the use of the Divine Name and to substitute "of the heavens"—is a phrase that no one has quite succeeded in expounding. Jesus uses it, not for a place, but for the *kind* of Kingdom. His thought has always to do with its nature, its character. It is a Kingdom whose treasure, foundation, relations and aims are different from all other kingdoms. "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36), represents this truth in all its aspects. I have used the phrase "the Kingdom of Right Relations" more to emphasize this fact than as a definition.

An old fancy of expositors has been revived in recent years. It is to the effect that in the Hidden Treasure the Kingdom is the object found, life's supreme discovery for which one forgoes everything

THE STORY OF THE TREASURE-FINDER

else : but in the second story, by a twist of thought familiar to the Oriental mind, the Kingdom is the King Himself and the pearl He finds is man ; to make him His own He gave up all that He had in the Incarnation. That this was in the Master's mind is not easily proved ; His intention seems to be to exhibit the essential similarity of the appeal of the Kingdom to widely divergent temperaments.

There is an excellent example of story-reconstruction from these two similitudes in Dr Glover's *Jesus of History*, pp. 105-8. It is too long to be quoted in full and too beautifully wrought to permit of extracts for quotation. It is commended to the reader as more suggestive and helpful than anything I can offer here.

Buried wealth and treasure-trove are recognized items of the story-teller's stock-in-trade in all ages. In "Galilee of the Gentiles" where the great routes ran which so many armies travelled there must have been many times when the scared inhabitants hastily concealed their wealth lest it should fall into the hands of a marauding soldiery ; and many a forgotten slaughter left the whereabouts of a hoard unknown until chance revealed it.

Such a casual discovery, made by a labourer with his spade or by a ploughman turning his furrow, is chosen by Jesus as typical of the way in which the Kingdom comes to some men. A man suddenly stumbles across the wealth of possibilities God has set in his path of life and, as in a flash, his whole life is changed ; fascinating prospects of a larger, fuller life, free from all care and toil, fill him with joy. His one object is to make this treasure his very own,

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so he rakes together every penny he can to buy the field and its secret possibilities.

The second story depicts an Eastern dealer in precious stones whose life has become a quest because of his absorbing passion for a perfect pearl. Ever travelling and seeking better gems for his collection, he lights at last upon a pearl so desirable that he parts with all his possessions to acquire it.

Both stories emphasize the incomparable value of the Kingdom—so great that anyone who realizes its worth will abandon all else for it. The lure of the Kingdom attracts very different characters; from the dull, unexpectant, unthinking fellow to the eager, restless disposition that is always questing, never satisfied for long, but with an instinct for “some better thing.” One man chances upon unexpected treasure and all his life is changed; the adventurer finds at last what he has long sought. Joy and satisfaction come to both.

Each word-picture contains one essential phrase—“all that he had.” What a man really desires is what he is willing to give up all other things for. Without “selling out” the Treasure or the Pearl cannot be had. So far as we are concerned, the selling is everything. This is the acid-test for disciples in these stories—and they are told to disciples. There is a yarn of the discovery of a diamond-mine in South Africa due to a prospector chancing upon a farmer’s child playing with some stones that had caught its fancy. Do we really appreciate the value of what has turned up before us? Are we alive to the value of the gem? The Kingdom is a test of man’s quality.

THE STORY OF THE PEARL-SEEKER

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Probably there were more of the Treasure-finder type among the early Christians ; men to whom the message came as a glad surprise, entirely unexpected. Find men of each type among the Apostles.

* “Covet earnestly the best gifts.” “Money is good, knowledge is better”—what is the best ? “Kindness is good, friendship is better”—what is the Pearl of Price ?

Read Matt. vi. 19-21, 33 ; xix. 16-25.

You do not give up other things for what you suppose you ought to love, or believe you ought to love, or for what you are trying to persuade yourself you do love. If these pictures are examined you may find the essential detail overlooked in such calculations. How do we learn to say “We love Thy Kingdom, Lord” ?

* 1 Cor. iii. 21-23. Has Paul expounded his Master’s teaching ? Or is he merely applying it ?

“Lo, we have left all.” If the Kingdom is really so valuable to us we shall not talk of the price we have paid for its acquisition.

* “For the joy thereof.” Is religion really like that ? Are *any* folk ready to give up all else ?

* *The Successful Merchant.* If a man has found a really good investment, if he is “on to a sure thing” in the business world, would he sell out other things—even at a loss ? If he did not, what would you consider was his faith in the good thing ? Would it be “good business” so to act ?

Ought we to make our calculations with regard to the

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Kingdom of God, and act upon them? Do not fall back upon an easy assent which you only back by your collection-money. If it is worth while—are you venturing?

“The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, and whoever shall know himself shall find it. Strive therefore to know yourselves, and ye shall be aware that ye are sons of the Almighty Father.”—*Saying of Jesus, from Oxyrhyncus Papyri.*

II. HOW THE KINGDOM GROWS.

1. SEED-GROWTH.

Mark iv. 26-29.

2. THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED.

Matt. xiii. 31, 32 ; Mark iv. 30-32 ;
Luke xiii. 18, 19.

3. LEAVEN.

Matt. xiii. 33 ; Luke xiii. 20, 21.

4. THE SOWER.

Matt. xiii. 3-9, 18-23 ; Mark iv. 3-9,
14-20 ; Luke viii. 5-8, 11-15.

SEED-GROWTH.

God's Kingdom is like a man who has sown seed in his field. He sleeps at night and gets up in the morning; all the while the seed is sprouting and growing—he does not know how, but it grows all the same.

The ground bears fruit of itself; first the green blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

But when the corn is ripe and permits of further activity the man comes again and at once "puts in the sickle because the harvest has come" (Mark iv. 26-29).

THIS parable is full of difficulty if we try to identify the farmer exclusively with Christ Himself. Indeed, it is difficult to identify Christ with the farmer at all, unless we are willing to recognize that in Him our human nature finds its fullest expression and that He also desired to see the fruit of His own work (cf. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished," Luke xii. 50), but saw that this thing, so dear to His heart, must be left in faith and patience to the Father's care and time.

The lesson, then, is the proper attitude for all who have the success of God's Kingdom at heart. They must learn from the farmer to be patient; to be reasonable in their activity, knowing that activity is not everything, for in spiritual growth as in natural there are no short cuts. In the spiritual as in the natural world, we can observe the facts of growth and its orderly development but the secret of it we never penetrate. Growth, Jesus notes, is not merely

SEED-GROWTH

mysterious, it is spontaneous ("of itself"). This truth is echoed by Paul when he says that it is not the planter nor the irrigator but God Himself who causes growth (1 Cor. iii. 7).

The vitality is in the seed, and the soil of human life possesses an inherent fitness for bringing the seed to fertile issues; it can and will yield the harvest. To this principle the Teacher Himself was always loyal. As Latham (*Pastor Pastorum*, p. 212) points out, He sought continually to give His followers *seed-thoughts*—principles, rather than a complete code of conduct, religious ideas rather than a system of theology.

In regard to the fundamental question of theology, the nature and person of God, He gave men just the key-thought of "Father" and left that to do its work.¹ He gave no moral code, but told men to be sincere, to be loving, to be like God, and left these things to grow.

Action, though important, has limitations of its range. Like the farmer who has sown his seed, we have to go on with life knowing that the results of past activities are developing and the time for further activity will come in due course. When the ripening permits (see the R.V. margin for verse 29) our energy will have its proper opportunity and patience will be shown to be not idleness but faith.

God's Kingdom requires of all who serve it, from its Founder onwards, activity and faith—faith not only in the divinely-given vitality of the seed but in

¹ Cf. "Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life,
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work."

A Death in the Desert—R. BROWNING.

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human nature also. Activity and faith ; both are service, and both are interdependent and necessary. There is no true activity without faith ; there is no true faith without activity. So the Kingdom grows.

The little story closes on the note of desire fulfilled and greater service made possible, closes with a familiar Jewish phrase (cf. Joel iii. 13) which is possibly a line from an old harvest-song.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

If you prefer to interpret the parable as referring to Christ the Heavenly Sower, remind yourself of the lines :

“ It is the way the Master went,
Should not the servant tread it still ? ”

* What legitimate inferences can you draw from this story as to the primary duty of disciples of Jesus ? Compare your answers with Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

* Sincerity, love and likeness to the Father. Correct or justify this summary of Christ's teaching (p. 43) from the Sermon on the Mount.

If “ the Kingdom of God is within you,” the parable admits of a personal interpretation also. How would you apply “ grows of itself ” to the cultivation of your own inner life ? and the rest of the parable ? Do you believe in your own spiritual resources ? If not, why not ?

The quality of the harvest is here regarded from the standpoint of the vitality of the seed ; in the Parable of the Sower it is looked at from the standpoint of the quality of the soil. The Master's mind sees all sides of a question ; encourage yourself to do the same.

SEED-GROWTH

Notice that whilst the farmer sleeps the good seed grows ; another story warns us that weeds also grow whilst men are asleep. Identify this and assimilate its warnings to this story of seed-growth.

* This parable answers by anticipation most of the common objections to missionary work which assume the inferiority of other races and peoples. Consider it in this light and confirm or correct your own attitude.

* Discuss the interrelations of activity and faith and their mutual bearing upon discipleship.

* “To be reasonable in activity.” Are some “repressions” beneficial, then ?

THE STORY OF A GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED.

How shall I tell you what God's Kingdom is like? It is like a mustard-seed which a man took and sowed in his field.

"Small as a grain of mustard-seed," we say; but when it is grown up it is bigger than all the other plants and becomes a regular tree where the "wild birds" come and "roost in the branches" (Matt. xiii. 31, 32; Mark iv. 30-32; Luke xiii. 18, 19).

THE idea of growth is the central teaching of this story. We must remember that in Christ's day modern ideas of development had not taken hold of the popular mind; and that most of their ideas of the coming of God's Kingdom involved something sudden, spectacular and overwhelming. Here the thought is mainly of the outward manifestations of its growth; in the twin-parable of the Leaven attention is directed to the inwardness of the *method* of growth.

In Mark's Gospel the story is introduced by a rhetorical question. The problem is to find something very small which has an innate power of development into something very great. A common Jewish saying was "as small as a mustard-seed," and this rather than any precise botanical knowledge suggests the analogy. *Khardal*, the Oriental equivalent of mustard, grows to a height of about twenty-five feet in Palestine from a very tiny seed.

The same simile was used in another connection by

STORY OF A GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED

Jesus when He spoke of that other "mustard-seed," faith which could move mountains or mulberry-trees. "Faith as a grain of mustard-seed" does not mean merely "as small as a mustard-seed" but "as vigorous in its vital power." Jesus here says the Kingdom appears insignificant and impotent, like a tiny seed in a man's hand. But when the man plants it that little seed will grow. In like manner this little movement already stirring in human society will grow to vast dimensions because of the vital force that lies hidden within it.

The story is a frank recognition of the apparent discrepancies already presenting themselves to the minds of some disciples between His claims and the present obscurity and insignificance of the movement. Jesus shows that this insignificance is in harmony with a general divine law manifested in the natural world. The parable is not merely a profession of boundless optimism; it is a statement of profound conviction based upon observation of the way and will of God, of a serene faith in the vitality of the new way of life which He is proclaiming.

For the encouragement of the disciples Jesus appeals triumphantly to the facts of life as everywhere revealed and shows that the growth of the Kingdom is natural and persistent.

The variations in the three versions of the story are unimportant as they are probably the results of confusion between similar Aramaic words. Luke's use of "garden" in place of "field" is simply the townsman's idea instead of the countryman's. But the reminiscences of phrases from Ezekiel and Daniel in the second verse are significant of more

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than our Lord's familiarity with the religious literature of His day. If the story is compared with Ezek. xvii. 22-24, one may gain a glimpse of the Master's mind expounding and enlarging the conceptions of the great prophets of His race.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Read Prov. xv. 16; xvi. 8; xxx. 24-28; Isa. xxviii. 10, 13; lx. 15-22; Luke xix. 17.

A Chinese Christian clergyman preaching on this parable made two points; they touch the centre of the teaching:

- (1) Men don't have to weed and hoe mustard; it has power in itself to grow in spite of all obstacles.
- (2) Once get mustard into a field and it is practically impossible to get it out again.

* What is the vital element of Christianity?

Note that the seed is the highest product of the plant, for which the fruit is merely a casing. The seed determines the character of all that springs from it.

* What did Christ plant that no one else has planted?

* A certain Missionary Society recorded the ordination of its first Burmese native minister. Years before they had established a Leper Hospital, and in connection with it a children's home in which the babies of leper mothers could be brought up away from the risk of contagion and here he had been reared. Do you consider this parable and its predecessor would enable you to form a defence of such an expenditure of missionary income against an objector

STORY OF A GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED

who considers that it should be used for “preaching the Gospel to the heathen” ?

* Is growth always outward and visible ?

* The Jews expected the coming of a Messiah ; they failed to recognize Jesus. What is wrong when the apparent insignificance of Christianity, or of Christians, is a stumbling-block ?

Do not measure the importance of things by their size but by their vitality.

LEAVEN.

God's Kingdom is like some sour dough which a housewife took and covered up in flour enough for a baking till the whole had risen (Matt. xiii. 33 ; Luke xiii. 20, 21).

THE twin-parables of the Mustard-seed and the Leaven were told to the peasantry of Galilee, the first to the menfolk gathered round the Teacher, the second to the women listening as they stood at their cottage-doors and kept a housewifely eye on the progress of the family baking within.

The stories are a pair in another sense : they must be taken together to exhibit the comprehensiveness of Christ's outlook and the full sweep of His conception. The Mustard-seed affirms the vitality of the Kingdom, the tremendous possibilities so little suggested by its present small beginnings : it is a confident prediction of growth. The illustration of the Leaven carries the conception a stage further and reveals the inward and constant energy by which the Kingdom grows, together with something of its method and character.

This homely picture indicates the *kind* of change which the Kingdom makes in human society ; the law by which this divine way of living is to unfold itself in the soul and in society. It is not in the first instance a change of form but of vital spirit and character. It is the introduction of a ferment

LEAVEN

which transforms the dull, inert mass into a living, growing, healthy and health-giving instrument of God's purpose. In the view of Jesus the world needs not new forms and organizations but a new spirit in the present forms. Christianity is not an organization but a Kingdom—a Kingdom within men. Like the leaven hidden in the dough, it will revolutionize human society, not by imposing a new code or social contract but by putting a right spirit into men. The activity of the new religion is regenerative rather than creative; its new and living waters are to flow in the old channels. God's Kingdom will effect its transformations by vitalizing human customs, institutions, relationships and occupations.

The religious, social and political applications of this parable, as well as its individual aspects, need to be carefully explored. The Jewish Messianic ideas supposed the Kingdom of God would come to men from without; an organized, triumphant theocracy established by a divine use of irresistible force. The same essential idea to-day seeks to make a new world by remodelling the circumstances of life. Christ says you must begin by regenerating the inner force of the human soul; make men and society wholesome from within, for sin is not in circumstances but in the soul. Growth will show later.

Leaven symbolizes the *method of growth* of this transforming power. The point that Jesus presses is that God is availing Himself of "natural" and not supernatural means for the extension of His Kingdom and has chosen that very means so often overlooked

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but which transcends in its possibilities all others—personal influence. The new principles are to be spread, not by any form of force (which would be a negation of the very principle of love), but by infection. There must be contact; mixing of the Christian with the non-Christian; ultimately, a more complete and perfect employment of fellowship with all its far-reaching implications. The world is to be made Christian by contagion.

The simile of this parable is more appropriate to unconscious influence than to intended influence. It does not say, Leaven the world, but, Be leavened and you will leaven. Exercise a healthy influence and mix with all men. Compare Jesus' own attitude to publicans and sinners. Deliberate attempts to influence another often react unfavourably; men's conduct influences us more than their counsel—unless the two are one. The Christian method is to be that of right action: as an abstract proposition we assent, but we have still to realize that this will influence people more than denunciation of their wrongdoing.

We lose much of the impulsive quality of the parable if we slur over its conclusion. Faith, like everything else that is vital to Christianity, is an infectious thing, and we need to become infected with our Lord's faith in the Gospel propaganda. "Till it was all leavened" is at once an accurate description of the consequence of the introduction of the self-multiplying foam-globe of yeast into dough, and a declaration of the confidence of Jesus in the method of growth.

LEAVEN

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* Are inward life and outward energy opposed ideas ? What do you consider the right relationship between them ?

* Consider the bearing of this parable on the Church life with which you are associated ; especially in relation to organization and activities with which you are connected. Would Jesus agree with the adoption of popular and attractive methods ?

The parable has been described as " an imperative demand for personal service." How is that demand implied ?

* Two political watchwords : " Principles, not persons." " Men, not measures." Which do you support ? Justify your choice from this parable.

* Systematic Theology is a recognized department of study. Defend or criticize " Our little systems have their day . . . and cease to be," in the light of this parable.

Read Matt. v. 14-16 ; Mark ix. 50 ; x. 14, 15 ; Luke xvii. 20-23. Find a relation between each passage and the parable.

Find two examples in the miracles of faith being infectious.

A critic says, " Why ' hid ' ? " He finds this is a meaningless phrase, and as the same Greek word was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew for " baked," proposes to read " a woman took and baked." He has dropped the idea of the hidden germ. Do you consider this an improvement or a crime ? Give your reasons for your choice, not for your scholarship.

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* The leaven is a bit of dough kept over from the last mixing, to obviate the necessity for a new supply of barm each day. Then it represents a ferment which is there already. What *is* the “missionary obligation” of a Christian ?

Dr Glover has made a very suggestive application of this parable to the story of the Christian Church, describing very vividly the picture in the Master’s mind. The reader is commended to the perusal of pp. 18-24 of *The Nature and Purpose of a Christian Society*.

THE TALE OF THE SOWER, THE SEED, AND THE SOIL.

Listen, O friends! In the springtime the sower went out to sow his seed.

As he went about it, some of the seed fell by the side of the road; so close that it was trampled upon by the passers-by. And the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on ground where there was rock just beneath the surface, so that it had not much depth of soil. It shot up quickly; but because it could get no moisture in the thin soil, the midday sun soon scorched it and it quickly withered away.

Some of the seed fell among the thorns; and they grew with it and choked it, so that it never eared properly.

The rest fell into good ground and sprang up and grew, yielding a varying return, some thirty, some sixty and some even a hundredfold.

To the disciples Jesus explained this afterwards. The seed that is sown is the Word; those who do not take it in are like the wayside soil; the birds represent the devil; those who hear it gladly but only for a while keep it in their hearts are the rocky ground; those who receive it but have many other concerns are the soil that nourishes thorns—which are the cares and riches and pleasures of life; the people who receive it in honest and good hearts and patiently bear the fruit are the good ground (Matt. xiii. 3-9, 18-23; Mark iv. 3-9, 14-20; Luke viii. 5-8, 11-15).

THIS parable forms a pair with the story of Seed-growth: with another pair, the Mustard-seed and the Leaven, it completes a group which set forth the mystery of the Kingdom of God. The whole series deals with growth, which is a mysterious thing. Have they one strand of thought running through them all? They exhibit uniformly the contrast between small causes and great effects; all

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speak of a hidden process set in action by apparently inadequate means.

Dean Stanley, when travelling in the Holy Land, found in the scenery of the Lake of Galilee an almost perfect setting for this parable :

“There was the undulating cornfield descending to the water’s edge. There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it . . . hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet. There was the good, rich soil which distinguishes the whole of that plain. . . . There was the rocky ground of the hillside protruding here and there through the cornfields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes. There were large bushes of thorn, springing up . . . in the very midst of the waving wheat ” (Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 425).

The central idea of the story is that, the seed being of one quality, the crop depends upon the character of the soil. The object of the story, then, is to explain the successes and failures of the message He proclaims. He whose business it is to do so, sows the seed, which is the Word. (Jesus saw Himself as both sower and seed. “He sowed His seed over hill and dale, and on the last bare hill He sowed Himself.”) It is a plain statement that Jesus has no easy task, and no easy philosophy to account for things. He recognizes that He must go steadily about His work, undeterred by failures—which will be apparent long before any real success is manifest. Nature’s processes show the way in which the Father’s Will is being accomplished. The seed of the good news will depend for its fruitfulness upon the soil into which it falls.

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This explanation, so reasonable and obvious in the natural world, is not quite accepted by men in reference to the spiritual. They assent to it but do not act upon it. They judge the seed by the soil more often than they admit that the quality of the soil is tested by the seed.

The exposition which the Teacher gives leaves some matters to the intelligence of the disciples. The points explained clearly show that while a parable may have one main lesson, it may have other related lessons conveyed by the details of the story. The main lesson is that divine truth is dependent for its fruition upon the receptiveness of the men who hear it. The section, *How the Parabolic Method Works* (pp. 28ff.), may be re-read in this connection.

The hard, trodden path represents an unresponsive heart. There is no response because there is no real reception of the seed. Receptiveness means more than listening; it means appropriating, making the thing heard one's own. The failure to understand is not due to any difficulty in the Word but to unresponsiveness. The seed-thought does not get entrance or time to do its work. That is the significance of the saying "He that hath ears, let him hear"—a saying with a touch of irony in it. The value of truth to you depends upon your reaction to it. This applies not merely to persons who sit devoutly quiet and pay no heed to the speaker, but also to those who treat truth as a matter for discussion, or a whetstone for scholarship, or an object for antiquarian research, or for intellectual consideration. They do not receive it into their own lives as an active principle to germinate and fruit there.

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The second type of failure is occasioned by the shallowness of men of emotional temperament and of facile character. They do not steadily devote themselves to the expression of the truth in their lives, and are put off by any little difficulty. It is the explanation of the disappointing quality of a merely emotional religious enthusiasm.

The third cause of failure is the neglect to "clean" the ground, which should be the first care of a good farmer. This figure represents those who permit the gradual encroachment of lesser interests upon their time and energies and affections. It is a picture of the preoccupied heart.

Though so much of the parable is concerned with the failures, these are only incidental; the sower is at work on the field, which is, broadly speaking, suitable for the seed and will yield a reasonable harvest. His work will show large and increasing returns. The sower's purpose is concerned with the good ground and his work is done—and this is true whether we think of the Master or of His servants to whom He gives good seed to sow in His field—not with an anxious eye on the unfavourable patches in the field but with a sure confidence in its ability to yield a good return for his toil and his seed. "With patience"—this is Luke's note—the seed will germinate and grow. Note that Luke mentions only the hundredfold return: Matthew and Mark in their reports disclose an interesting contrast in evangelistic temperaments, Mark's "some thirty, some sixty, some an hundredfold" gives an ascending order, a growing optimism of spirit; Matthew's is a descending order, "some a hundred, some sixty,

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some thirty ” ; here is a less hopeful and buoyant temper.

The full meaning of these stories of the Kingdom was long in its germination in the hearts of the disciples. At the close of Jesus' ministry they were still looking for the catastrophic coming of the Kingdom, still thinking in terms of a national rising, victorious armies and scattered enemies ; or of the opened heavens and a manifestation of Divine authority that would end all debate and cow all opposition. Against all forms of the delusion that force, if there is only enough of it, will bring in God's Kingdom, Christ sets the lessons of God written in the Book of Nature.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* If God desires all men to be happy why are there any difficulties ? What or who causes them ? Why do some agencies for the extension of the Kingdom fail ? Answer according to this parable.

“ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy . . . mind.” Consider the bearing of this, if any, on this parable.

This story deals with causes, not with cures. Are there any cures for the faults suggested by the story ? How would you proceed, according to the analogy suggested by the story, in dealing with these faults in yourself ?

In a high sense, all men are labourers called by God to scatter the seed. “ My Father is the husbandman.”

* Remember that in the Bible “ the Word of God ” never means the Bible itself. What does it mean ?

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Classify according to the parable: those whose religion lies on the surface of their lives, those who receive the good seed, but keep some of the love for things to which they are addicted, those who disapprove of "mere morality" and all who

"Compound for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to."

* Extended series of experiments are made with new grades of wheat in the different wheat-producing countries.

"The field" in the parable of the Tares is explained as "the world"; and, presumably, we cannot gauge the full possibilities of the Christian religion until we have learned how all the races of mankind react to it. What is the bearing of this parable on (a) world-outlook; (b) international politics; (c) the missionary motive?

"Jesus had no easy task." Cf. Hooke, *Christ and the Kingdom of God*, chap. xi., where the Master's disappointing experience in Galilee sets this in bold relief.

* "The quality of the soil is tested by the seed." Let members of the circle think out illustrations of this in various fields of activity in which they are interested and discuss the Master's application of the principle to human life.

III. THE KING'S FEELING TOWARDS US.

1. THE LOST SHEEP,

Luke xv. 3-7 ; Matt. xviii. 12, 13 ;
and

THE LOST COIN.

Luke xv. 8-10.

2. THE LOST SONS.

Luke xv. 11-32.

THE TALES OF THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COIN.

Suppose a farmer owns a hundred sheep and one of them has wandered astray. Doesn't he let the ninety-nine run loose on the fells and go, clambering down precipices and searching ravines if need be, seeking the straggler until he finds it?

When he finds it he lays it on his shoulders joyfully and carries it back to the flock. I tell you he is more excited and full of joy about that one sheep than over the ninety-nine that never stirred up his fears and anxieties! He goes around telling everybody about it and shares his gladness with them.

God the Father feels the same about every one of His children. So I tell you there will be joy in God's heart over one sinner who comes to a better mind, more than over ninety-nine good folk who need no such change.

Or again, suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one of them. Will she not light a lamp, sweep all the house, and hunt diligently until she finds it?

When she has found it she can't keep her gladness to herself but calls her women-friends and neighbours together and says: "Come and rejoice with me; for I have found the coin which I lost."

God's love is like that. He, too, calls together His friends and there is gladness in heaven over one repentant sinner (Luke xv. 3-10; Matt. xviii. 12, 13).

THESE two parables—one of which is given in another connection and in a condensed form in Matt. xviii. 12, 13—with the Tale of the Lost Sons form a triad in which Jesus' deepest convictions of the love of God are set forth. They are linked together by the words "lost" (verses 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 17, 22, 32), "sin" (verses 7, 10, 19, 21), and "joy" (verses 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 24, 32).

TALES OF LOST SHEEP AND LOST COIN

In this first pair the same lesson is presented by each story perhaps looked at from the several stand-points of the men and of the women in the company. They vindicate Jesus' friendship with the religious outcasts of His day against the sneers of Pharisees who criticized Him for making such people welcome and for the worse breach of pious decorum involved in accepting their invitations and dining with them, in being, as they said, "a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber; a friend of publicans and sinners."

In both stories the central person is one who has lost something. Let us set that down, for it is apt to be forgotten in the story of the strayed sheep. This is partly our carelessness, partly the influence of popular hymns, partly because the Master's own use of the Shepherd figure from the twenty-third Psalm has captivated the imagination of the Church from the earliest days. The sheep suffers no sense of loss. It might, later, if not retrieved, be exposed to the perils of the open; but the story is not concerned with that question. It is the owner who becomes anxious when he finds it is missing. The ninety-nine are left in their usual pasturage. "Wilderness" does not mean what it suggests to us to-day—a place to get lost in; it is the usual and proper designation of tracts of land suitable for pasture and possessing sheepfolds, habitations and so on (cf. moorland country, the Cumberland fells, or the downs). They are left, perhaps in care of a shepherd, because the owner is not anxious about them but is anxious about the missing one. When he finds it (note "*until* he finds"), in his joy he carries it

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back on his shoulders and goes off to tell his friends of the loss, the search, and the glad recovery.

In the second story we have a woman in place of a man and she has lost a drachma, a Greek coin corresponding to the more familiar denarius current in Gospel days which represents roughly a day's wage (see the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard). These, being obsolete coin, were head-ornaments and one missing would spoil the set. We have a picture of the windowless cottage of the Syrian peasant, where it is necessary to light a lamp to search for so small a thing, and the earthen floor is diligently swept "*until* she finds it." The joy of the recovery sends her out to seek her neighbour-housewives, as the man went to his friends.

Both pictures illustrate supremely one truth : that recovery is a great joy, and a great joy demands fellowship and expression.

This defence of His friendship with tax-gatherers and sinners is noteworthy, too, for Jesus' acceptance of the common distinction made in His day between "sinners" and "just persons." He accepts it and endorses it. But He does not endorse the idea that "just" persons were all right.¹ The surprising thing was that He sought the sinners and avoided the just persons. It probably surprised both parties. A more surprising thing was that sinners invited Him and were friendly with Him ! Usually they avoid the religious. Incidentally it is clear that, despite His many defections from the religious observances of His day, His opponents recognized that He was not a sinner

¹ Cf. The Tale of the Lost Sons and the Tale of Two Prayers.

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and that it was strange He should consort with such. The justification of Jesus is in these two stories.

He says "What man of you" or "What woman of you," appealing directly to personal experience. When men lose things they are not given to reflect philosophically that they have more left than they have lost; they make all the more ado about the thing, simply because it is lost. So, too, the joy when it is recovered is simply joy *because* it is recovered. That is an analysis of normal human emotion: any man, any woman, acts like that.

Then follows a remarkable self-identification of Jesus—sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—with the Divine desire and purpose. Dr Glover has noted the parallelism with the book of Job (chap. xxxvii.): even as the morning stars sang together at the Creation and the sons of God shouted for joy, so at the recovery of the lost there is joy among the angels in Heaven.

"We can believe in such joy when God made the world; but can we believe that there was the same joy in the presence of God yesterday when a coolie gave his heart to God? Jesus does. That is the central thing, it seems to me, in His teaching about God—that God cares for the individual to an extent far beyond anything we could think possible. If we can wrestle with that central thought and assimilate it, or, as the old divines said, 'appropriate' it, make it our own, the rest of the Gospel is easy" (T. R. Glover, *Jesus of History*, p. 99).

To return for a moment to the fact that the loss spoken of is the owner's loss—for we need to be clear about this quite as much as the Pharisees did. It is

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the owner, not the sheep, who is anxious. The "lostness" of the sinner, as emphasized in these parables is, primarily, God's loss. It is a safeguard against theological error of the pharisaic type to remember that God loves men, even sinful men, and is anxious over them. The pictures of anxious search disclose the fact of God's love for us, and that that love is personal and settles upon individuals. The ninety-nine others can none of them fill the place of the hundredth because each has his own place in that love: the nine coins safely in hand do not compensate for the fact that a tenth of the wealth is missing. Recovery of the lost brings its own joy; so the owner seeks for it—and does not expect or wait for the lost thing to seek him. The initiative rests with God. That is one explanation of the Incarnation.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

We find it hard, in actual practice, to believe that God loves men. Consider how impossible it is for a child to understand its parents' love for it. Read and lay to heart Jude 21.—God's love for us (see Moffatt's Translation).

"Lost" means "Not found yet."—*Edna Lyall.*

* J. is very depressed and confides to you that she has lost all hope; that her life is darkened by the feeling that she is a lost soul; talks about the unforgivable sin. Write her a helpful letter.

* Note the certainty with which Jesus speaks about

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Heaven : how the Father's Will is done there, how they neither marry nor are given in marriage, how the angels of the little ones behold the Father's face, how they rejoice over repentant sinners—always something man doesn't know of himself, yet realizes its truth when told. How does this affect our view of Jesus ? And of Heaven ?

* X. says : “ I have tried to love God ; but I think my past life has simply destroyed my capacity for any such love.” What can you say to X. ?

THE TALE OF THE LOST SONS.

There was once a man who had two sons: and the younger said to him:

"Father, it is getting time you divided your estate. Give me the share of the property which is to come to me."

So he divided his estate between them.

In a few days' time the Younger Son, having turned all his share into cash, went away from home into a distant country. There, away from his father's care and the restraints of home, he went the pace and squandered all his capital.

Just when he had spent all his money, a severe famine occurred in that very country to which the spendthrift had gone, and he himself soon began to feel the pinch of want. So he went and thrust himself upon one of the citizens of that country who did not want him in the least but sent him into his fields as a swineherd. So starved was he that he tried to stifle the pangs of hunger by eating the locust beans on which the pigs were feeding. But even when his wretched condition was thus made evident no one would give him anything.

At last, faint and famished, he began to realize what a fool he had been.

"My father's hired men," he said to himself, "to say nothing of his household servants, have more bread than they can eat; and here am I, starving to death! I will bestir myself and go to my father and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God and before your very eyes: I don't deserve to be called "Son" by you any more. Take me on as one of your hired men.'"

So he roused himself from his despair and tramped to his father.

But long before he reached him, his father (he *was* his father, you know), saw him and, filled with tenderness, hurried to meet him, threw his arms round his neck and rained kisses upon him.

The lad began to say to him, "Father, I have sinned against God and before your very eyes. I don't deserve to be called 'Son' by you any more"—but the rest of his speech was hushed in his father's arms.

When they got to the house the father said to the household slaves:

"Hurry! One of you fetch the best robe we have in the house!"

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And you! Give my boy a ring for his hand! Bring shoes for his feet! Go fetch the calf that has been fattened and kill it, and let us have a right merry feast! For this boy of mine was dead to me and he has come to life again; he was lost and is found!"

And they began to be right merry.

Now the Elder Son was out on the farm. On his return, drawing near to the house he heard the sound of minstrels and dancing-girls. Calling one of the house-boys, he inquired what all this might mean.

"Thy brother has come home," the boy told him, "and thy father has killed the calf that was fattened because he has got him back safe and sound."

So he was angry and would not go in.

His father came out and repeatedly begged him to join them, but he replied to his father:

"Look here, all these years I have worked like a slave for you and never disobeyed any command of yours, but you never gave me so much as a kid—let alone a prime calf—that I might have a dinner with my friends! But when this precious son of yours, this fellow who has squandered your estate on his harlots, when he is come, forsooth, you have killed for him the calf that was fattened!"

And his father said to him:

"My lad, you and I are always together and all my property is really yours. To be merry and have a feast was surely fitting; for this brother of yours, of whom you think so hardly, was dead, so that you had no brother; and lo! he is alive again: he was a lost brother and is found again to-day" (Luke xv. 11-32).

THIS story touches our deepest emotions; any words jar, for all words are inadequate. Perhaps such a mood reacts upon the soul more profitably than intellectual eagerness and more ineffaceably than argument.

" . . . A sunset touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul."
(*Bishop Blougram's Apology*, R. Browning.)

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In the stories of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin the Master draws illustrations from mere material possessions, the chief point being that when anything is valued the joy occasioned by its recovery is so much greater than the mere pleasure of possessing it, in consequence of the temporary uncertainty as to its fate. It is the application of a commonplace of human tragic experience—that we never realize how much some things mean to us until we have lost them.

The parable of the Lost Sons raises the level and the importance of the issue. Kinship is more than ownership. The father's grieving is not mentioned, but we realize it in the reaction of his subsequent joy. It was not mere grief that one son was lost to his sight and daily companionship ; it was the loss of the filial relation, the revelation that the affection and confidence of his child have passed him by. The joy is occasioned not merely by the prodigal's return, but by his return to sonship—"This *my son* was dead and is alive again ; was lost and is found."

We relate the reference instinctively to the teaching of Jesus about the Divine Fatherhood ; but it is wise to hasten slowly and to recognize that the story has an immediate reference as well as an ultimate bearing. It is the crown of Christ's defence for His friendship with the religious outcasts. "Father, I have sinned against heaven"—"heaven" is a reverent Jewish periphrasis for the Ineffable Name of God : then the earthly father does not represent God directly. He represents Jesus Himself ; and the argument of the defence is that in His friendship with the disreputable He is doing as God does. For Christians the ultimate synthesis of

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thought may leave no distinction ; but let us see clearly *how* we learn to think of Jesus, and how inevitable are the soul's instinctive conclusions concerning Him.

An ageing man is depicted dividing his estate between his sons, now arrived at manhood, according to Hebrew custom which knew little or nothing of our modern testamentary dispositions. Neither law nor custom gives legal standing to a will in Syria ; and a father who did not divide his property often caused a situation fraught with difficulty and litigation (cf. Luke xii. 13). Two-thirds go to the elder (cf. Deut. xxi. 17), and the Younger Son realizes the remaining portion of the estate and disappears from the home. The Vulgate and some Syriac versions report the Elder Son as saying, " This son of thine who has devoured *his* living with harlots," and this rendering would be true to the normal facts of the case. His dissolute life of pleasure in some gay city of ancient times is brought to an end by the dissipation of his money, and his reduction to beggary coincides¹ with a time of dearth in the country whither he has gone to " enjoy life " according to his ideas. The time comes when pleasure inevitably fails (Eccles. xii. 1), when the husks with which he seeks to stay his cravings give no satisfaction. All this is portrayed with consummate art and every detail, instinct with life, serves to accentuate the purport of the whole : the Jew, so lost to all save the sense of bodily need that he becomes a swine-

¹ More than once Jesus uses this thought of the foreseeing Providence of God. Compare in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the passing along the road of priest and Levite "by coincidence"—very unfortunately translated by the pagan phrase "by chance."

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herd—and only gets that detestable employment by clutching desperately at some local farmer who doesn't want him or care for him; his famished state; the day when he lies giddy and faint with hunger and, recovering from his swoon, recovers at the same time a memory of life on the home farm.

As the poor wretch limps homewards we overhear his soliloquy. There is nothing very noble about it, no sense of the fatherly love that has been flouted, merely a conviction that he has been a fool. It were better to be a labourer on the old farm where the workmen were sure of enough to eat than to starve in this land of misery. He composes his speech as he journeys; he knows he has acted disgracefully; he has no thought of anything better than that his father may relent sufficiently to find him a labourer's job, which is a grade below the house-slaves, for in the far country he has sunk to this level.

Note the art which gives the central interest in all this portion of the parable to this lost son himself.

Swiftly there follows the tremendous emotional enlightenment occasioned by the unbosoming of the father's heart.

With the Narrator, we take our stand at the door of the father's house; the father is there, looking down the road. We know at once, the simplicity of the narrative compels us to know, something of the father's anxiety and anguish. The old eyes, their sight quickened by love, see the returning prodigal from afar. The dignity of age is cast aside and, young again in the impetuosity of love, he runs to

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meet the wanderer. The prodigal's halting attempt to deliver the speech he had rehearsed breaks down, but his emotions are forgotten as we are made to realize the unrestrained joy of the father. Its abandon is eloquent of anxiety and sorrow long endured, and every touch now reveals the greatness of the recoil. The whole establishment is set in lively motion, the calf that every hospitable farmer of substance keeps in readiness against the advent of an unexpected guest is slaughtered for a feasting,¹ the minstrels are summoned, servants are dispatched to bring out a festival robe, to procure a ring and the shoes that differentiate a man of position and family from the hired servant class (cf. Jas. ii. 2), and the scene closes in mirth, festival and joy. The son has returned, ragged, forlorn and needy. That is enough for love. He is received, not because he is a reformed character but because love was waiting for him, yearning over him. It is a picture of the readiness of Divine love to meet an imperfect contrition and to take the will for the deed.

The companion-picture to this portrait of Divine Love and humanity's imperfect response is a sketch of the Elder Son. Doubtless in the immediate intent of the parable on the occasion of its delivery he represented the Pharisees and Scribes who murmured against Jesus for His predilection for "bad company." Every touch heightens the life-likeness

¹ Such hospitality was almost an article of religion in the Syrian countryside, as it is with Arabs to-day. Honour is done to the guest by killing a sheep at the threshold upon his arrival, that he may step over the body and form a blood-covenant with his host. Here, a new covenant is made between father and son.

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of the portrait of an ungenial, servile, grudging and envious disposition. The churlish nature, roused to suspicion by the tokens of another's joy ; the slumbering resentment, quickened to anger when he hears the news ; his lack of brotherly affection ; all reflect the spirit of the murmurers. His stubborn unsympathetic attitude towards his father's happiness ; his mercenary view of his own relationship ; the subtle suggestion of a secret sympathy with sin that he lacked the courage or the recklessness to give effect to, suggested by the way in which he implies that his brother has had a high old time of it—all these reveal that Jesus has detected in the pharisaic temper an inward and unsuspected alienation from God. He also is a lost son.

This was the sin of professionalism in religion ; it is a thing to be detected most surely in men's attitude to their fellows. It is in the *contrast* between the reception which the prodigal receives from the father and the Elder Brother that the immediate point of the story lies. Jesus presents this as a "deadly parallel" to the reception the sinner has from God as compared with that which the Pharisees would give him. The purpose of the whole parable, from this standpoint, is to rebuke the Scribes and Pharisees ; and there is much to be said for Dr Dale's suggestion that for the proper appreciation of the parable in its context it should be called the Parable of the Elder Brother. But he *is* called "his elder son," for the failure of the filial relation lies behind the failure of the fraternal.

The story exhibits a perfect employment of the principle of contrast. The Prodigal who has wan-

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dered away was foreshadowed by the story of the Lost Sheep ; the Lost Coin which was in the house all the time foreshadows the Elder Son. The Prodigal does wrong, and comes to realize his error ; the Elder Son is wrong all the time and does not see it. The Prodigal recognizes that to be a servant is as much as he has any right to expect ; but the Elder Son has always been a servant and not a son in spirit (" Lo, these many years have I *served* thee "). He is not *at one* with his father ; he never has been. Both have had heart-hunger ; the younger has found that outside of the father's arms there is no satisfaction ; but the elder has never realized the hunger of his own heart. So the father is represented as entreating him to look for his joy in the right direction—where it has been waiting, unrecognized, for him all the time : but there is no need of entreaty for the Younger Son.

Underlying the contrast is the Narrator's recognition of an unacknowledged kinship between the two men (" This, thy brother "). The self-satisfied Elder Son and the selfish Younger Son are both out of harmony with the father. Both exhibit an incapacity to find their joy in the father's love and presence and ways. One is merely servile and finds a few cronies whom his father never asks in ; the other is dissatisfied and goes off to a far country ; neither is fully at home with the father. According to Jesus, men don't see things as God sees them and don't do things as God would do them. But in the last analysis the spirit of the sinners was often right though their deeds were wrong ; on the other hand, the deeds of the religious were often right

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though their spirit was wrong. Ultimately it is a worse thing to be wrong in spirit than to be wrong in deed. We are left in uncertainty as to what happened to the Elder Brother—perhaps to show how difficult it is to be hopeful for a way out when the whole spirit and temper of the life is out of touch with the spirit and temper of God.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Ps. ciii. "Like as a father," etc. Here is Jesus' exposition of that Scripture.

* What *is* it to be a prodigal? If we spend our time, our opportunities, our acquisitions, on pleasing ourselves it is called "selfishness." Apart from the coarser sinfulness of a life of debauchery, is such a life any less sinful? Is there an *essential* difference of spirit?

Prof. Drummond found that the sin of the Elder Brother was the sin of anger. Christ speaks about anger in the Sermon on the Mount. See what He says and probe the matter more deeply than Prof. Drummond's exposition goes.

* Do all men really want fellowship with God? Do they know that they want it? Find a commentary in the parable on

"Far and wide, though all unknowing
Pants for thee each human breast."

* A man who has tried everything else and been disappointed turns at last to "religion." Such "conversions" are frequently spoken of contemptuously. Find from this story the mind of Christ about them.

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* Why is it worse to be wrong in spirit than to be wrong in deed ? Find other justifications of this statement in the teaching of Jesus.

Taking the analysis of Love in 1 Cor. xiii. 4-8, examine how many of its attributes are portrayed in the father in this parable.

* Did the Elder Son go in ? If he did, at the last, what induced him to do so ? What change took place in him before he did so ?

* On p. 70 it is said " the parable of the Lost Sons raises the level and the importance of the issue." Is this level and importance sustained in the second portrait of the parable ? Give all your reasons.

IV. OUR ACCESS TO THE KING.

1. THE CHURLISH NEIGHBOUR,

Luke xi. 5-8 ;
and

THE CYNICAL JUDGE.

Luke xviii. 1-8.

2. THE TALE OF TWO PRAYERS.

Luke xviii. 9-14.

THE TALE OF THE CHURLISH NEIGHBOUR.

Suppose any one of you had a neighbour to whom he went in the middle of the night and said :

"Old man, lend me three barley-cakes; for a friend of mine who is on a journey has called in to see me and I haven't a crust in the house to set before him."

And the man inside answered and said :

"Don't bother me! The door is barred and my children are all with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything":

I tell you that although he will refuse to rise and give to a man because he is his friend, yet at last, because he shamelessly keeps on clamouring he will get up and give him as much as he needs (Luke xi. 5-8).

THE TALE OF THE CYNICAL JUDGE.

(The Evangelist's Preface: Jesus told this tale to impress upon the disciples the necessity of persevering in prayer and never losing heart.)

There was once a cadì in a certain city who cared for neither God nor man.

And there was a helpless widow in the same city, with no money to bribe him and no guardian to stand up for her, who kept on coming to him and saying :

"Give me protection from my adversary who is oppressing me."

Time after time he turned a deaf ear to her appeals; but after a while he said to himself :

"One never knows when the lower classes will take the law into their own hands! Though I've no reverence for God and care nothing for what men may say about me, yet I will give this widow justice because she bothers me. If she keeps on coming like this she may try to assault me some day—perhaps give me a black eye!"

Listen to what this conscienceless cadì says and consider it well. Will not God see justice done to His chosen ones who know neither

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times nor seasons, but are continually crying to Him? Is He likely to be dilatory in such a case? I tell you, He will see justice done to them quickly. Yet when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith (which is just such persistency) on earth? (Luke xviii. 1-8).

BOTH these stories are told, in different connections, to teach the efficacy of entreaty, and the spirit of persistency which Christ commends as essential to prayer.

The grumpy neighbour who, naturally enough, objects to being roused from his sleep in the middle of the night, the coarse, conscienceless cadi who only acts from sheer exasperation, illustrate how pressure overcomes reluctance and importunity succeeds where persuasion fails.

Both pictures are from humble life. The cottage where the living-room is converted into a bedroom by barring the door and unrolling the sleeping-mats; the traveller on foot who sets out about sunset; the hand-to-mouth existence where not even three barley scones can be found ready on a sudden emergency, form the material for the former. The subject of the second sketch is a widow, the Oriental type of forlornness and helplessness, bullied by an extortionate person who has got some hold over her; day after day she appears before the callous magistrate, and at last gains her end by sheer feminine persistency.

The inference from the stories is that importunity prevails irrespective of the character of the person importuned. The neighbour who has no particular objection to lending some bread but a decided objection to being roused by unseasonable clamour at his door is a contrast to the central figure of

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another story—the Good Samaritan. Though a neighbour he feels unneighbourly at midnight ; the Samaritan though a stranger and of alien race is moved by true neighbourly spirit. The borrower is portrayed under circumstances which declare that prayer is never unseasonable ; that he who keeps on asking, receives ; that the door will open to the man who keeps on knocking (compare the conclusions drawn in Luke xi. 9, 10). So, too, the widow who has no personal claim on the judge for help—he is a man who cares nothing for justice as a motive—exemplifies the certainty of ultimate blessing following persistent prayer.

The same lesson was taught by implication in some of Jesus' works of mercy when He openly welcomed the aggressive eagerness of folk who forced themselves on Him and declared that behind such action was the spirit of real faith : consider the instances of the Woman with the Issue of Blood, the Paralytic brought by his friends, and the persistent Blind Man. Such a spirit, He says, is especially welcome to God in prayer. God is willing to be importuned—nay, He desires it—for the fulfilment of His great purpose of blessing us.

The argument used is an argument from contrast. A churlish fellow and a conscienceless official are contrasted with a fatherly God who is just and merciful to all. Those who forget that parables are a comparison of relations and not of persons or things might easily be perplexed, and suppose that God is likened to these people.

Jesus adduces facts of common experience to establish the truth that persistency succeeds even

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with unwilling or callous persons. (Probably most of us have given to a beggar, simply because of his persistency—to relieve ourselves rather than him !)

He says, in effect, Reckon, if you like, on God as equally disinclined to give : but do not conclude that prayer is a waste of time, or you will show yourself less intelligent than the helpless widow whose only weapon is “her continual coming.” The application of this argument is by a “How much more” : for he who prays has to do with a truly friendly Friend, a righteous Judge and Defender. We might fairly represent the argument thus : “If such folk as the judge and the neighbour can be moved to action, how much more certain is it that God will act for men, on whom His choice has fallen ? to whom He has already shown His love ? Will you not let Him find faith on the earth ? He is faithful ; let His people, then, match their King by that prayerful persistency which is of the essence of faith : be encouraged to unwearied prayer for that good time when all desires shall be fulfilled. Pray ; and don’t grow faint-hearted.”

These illustrations do not profess to deal with the problems of prayer as they are frequently stated nowadays and to discuss them in this connection would not be quite relevant. The point here is the practice rather than the theory of prayer. The stories emphasize Jesus’ exhortation to continual prayer. A legitimate inference from them would be that prayer is part of the divine plan or order, which includes results that are to be brought about by our prayers. Jesus seeks to guard men

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against the temptation to abandon the habit of prayer on the assumption that it is essentially an attempt to interfere with the divine purpose.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

“Prayer is of the deepest and most constant necessity to the religious life. To frame a satisfactory theory of it may be the most difficult problem in theology; but to live without it is the highest impossibility to the devout spirit.”

Make a cento of passages from the Psalms which give expression to the conviction that God hears and answers man's prayer.

* “I do not find prayer a help to a devout spirit. I believe that God is my Father, that He has ordered all things wisely, that His Will is best. For me to interfere and demand simply that what I want should be done seems merely irreverent.” Explain prayer to this philosopher.

* Is any reason given in these stories for believing that God's plans will be altered by human persistency?

* Set down in items what seem to you the causes of *apparent* reluctance to answer prayer.

Ps. xxii. 2: “I cry in the daytime, but thou answerest not.” Read also the whole of Ps. lxxxviii. Resolve these perplexities in the light of Christ's stories.

* “Pray always.” But is this possible? If we ought to do it, surely, we can. How?

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* “The chief object of prayer must always be the coming of the Kingdom.” If this is so—but consider very carefully whether it is so or no—then our persistency means that we are bringing the power of faith to bear upon the Divine purpose. Meditate upon what this involves for your own devotional life. Paul considered that co-operation was an essential part of God’s plan for the coming of the Kingdom (see 1 Cor. iii. 9) ; is there a co-operation other than in works ? If so, how is it to be achieved ?

“Let not him who seeks cease until he finds, and when he finds he shall be astonished ; astonished he shall reach the Kingdom and, having reached the Kingdom, he shall rest.”—*Uncanonical Saying of Jesus.*

THE TALE OF TWO PRAYERS.

Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a toll-collector.

The Pharisee, standing apart in a prominent place where everybody would see him, repeated the prescribed prayers. But inside himself he was really saying :

"Thank God, I'm not like the rest of men—swindlers, rascals, adulterers ; or even as this tax-gatherer fellow ! I fast every Monday and Thursday. I give a tenth part of everything I get."

The toll-collector, standing a long way off from the worthy Pharisee, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but kept on beating his breast and saying :

"God forgive me ! The sinner of sinners !"

I tell you this despised one went down to his house made right with God, but the other man did not. For a humble spirit lifts us up to God's heart, but self-importance thrusts us down from Him (Luke xviii. 9-14).

WE must remember that this tale was told to Christ's contemporaries, to whom the term "Pharisee" had not become a byword. We have a most unfavourable conception of the Pharisees, but in our Lord's day they stood high in public esteem ; they were men of strict sanctity who lived up to a high standard of moral observances. Paul himself can find no better expression of his own strenuous endeavours after holiness in his earlier life than to say that he was "a Pharisee as regards the law" (Phil. iii. 7). "Publican," on the other hand, was a term of un-mixed opprobrium ; they were men very generally disliked and despised as oppressors of and traitors to their country. If the reflections of the parable

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are in any way applicable to our day they must assume on the one hand a person of blameless conduct, generally esteemed for his absolute and sincere observance of a high and exacting religious standard, and, on the other hand, one from the lowest moral grade of the social scale, whose sin is ugly, un concealed and unashamed.

The record states that this parable was given as a warning to those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." This type is represented by the Pharisee at prayer; the toll-collector is the contrasted type. Both men come to the house of prayer; one is wrong with God and knows it; the other is also wrong with God but does not even suspect it. Pharisaism, in its unfavourable sense, is a spirit of which we do not readily suspect ourselves; most men who are Pharisees do not know it. This tale gives a test that we can apply to ourselves.

The temper exemplified by the Pharisee is an offensive one in any department of conduct. The people who exhibit it are the ones who fail to recognize its offensiveness—hence the need of the searching analysis given to it by the Story-teller. Man too readily assumes that he is free from those vices of character he dislikes in others. The ground of the Pharisee's confident rectitude was himself—he was one of those who "trusted in themselves"; and his self-satisfaction causes him to consider the rest of humanity as of small account as compared with himself.

His deportment reveals the man. In the temple he takes a conspicuous place, apart from other folk.

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His outward acts express his essential character, as his self-communing reveals. It is "self-communing" although he thinks it is prayer; he glances at God, so to speak, but what he says within himself is all self-contemplation. His satisfaction is that he is not as other men; that is because his religion is essentially a matter between himself and other men, not between himself and God. This springs from an intrinsic shallowness of character that contents itself with appearances and never penetrates to reality; such a spirit is extremely careful to be acknowledged of all men as godly, but may be quite void of the love of God.

To such a man it is a matter for thankfulness (which, however, only amounts to self-congratulation) that he is not like the common run of mankind, of whose sins he gives a disapproving recital, "passing over judgment and the love of God," as Jesus observes elsewhere. His thoughts take survey of his fellows around him, ending with a touch of disdainful contempt for the tax-gatherer who passed with him into the temple courts. These thoughts that he considers prayer reveal the inner man more completely. He stands before "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," and the man himself appears. His desire is to surpass other men, and he seeks to manifest his superiority. He fasts on Mondays and Thursdays, which is more than the Law requires; he gives tithes of all that he gets (income that is, not capital: "all that I possess" suggests more than a Pharisee would dream of). And all that he says

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of himself is true. But it is all that there is to be said for him.

“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” The warning refers to this spirit of externalism which spoils otherwise excellent practices. The Master’s precepts about Alms-giving, Prayer and Fasting (Matt. vi. 1-8), the three great observances of Judaism, are all warnings against this spirit and are all of them exemplified by this Pharisee in the temple. Externalism makes observances ends in themselves, and forgets that they are designed as a means to fellowship with God and man. The peril is always with us. Men construct codes for themselves, set aside specific times for prayer, for reading or studying the Bible, apportion specific sums for religious and charitable purposes, and so on. If they do not keep their hearts with all diligence the practice of these observances becomes their aim in religion instead of the *results* such observances should produce; so they, in turn, pass over the love of God. The peril of the Church and of the individual is that methods of cultivating the spiritual life are continually devised which work well for a time but make men Pharisees as soon as they forget their ultimate purpose. The energizing motive of one generation becomes the fetish of the next and a spiritual hindrance to the third. The practice of observances is a distinctive thing and soon becomes the mark of a professing Christian. People then desire to acquire that mark as a badge of their profession, forgetting that self-esteem is a fatal barrier to all spiritual progress, forgetting, too, that those who do “observe” ought to live up to the implications of

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their profession. Those hotly-indignant words about men who devour widows' houses and, for a pretence, make long prayers, disclose the grave disservice done to religion by church-goers whose business methods, or ill-temper, or censoriousness, or uncharitableness, make religion a byword.

Afar off from the Pharisee, feeling himself unworthy to come near so favoured a servant of God, stands the despised Publican, his attitude eloquent of self-abasement, his soul overwhelmed by the sense of the Divine presence. Of all in the temple, he feels himself to be *the* sinner. The cry of this poor man's soul, crushed and hopeless though he be, has in it the germ of a new life. When the heart fails under the sense of sin, when all is dark, then God is near. "This despised one" went down from the temple accounted as righteous. All men need to pray the Publican's prayer; and if they do not know that they need it, they need it all the more.

In the prayer-stories of Jesus there is only one character whose prayer is unheard. It is the Pharisee whose self-congratulatory utterances do not reach beyond himself. God does not heed him because his prayer is really prayer to himself and not to God. The prayer of self-satisfaction fails to reach God because it needs Him not; it is the heart that needs God to which He draws near in that fellowship which is mercy to the sinner. Self-esteem casts men down from God's fellowship, self-humiliation lifts them up to Him.

THE TALE OF TWO PRAYERS

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Read the twelfth chapter of Romans and meditate on the safeguards against pharisaism it provides.

* Bishop Gore speaks of the pharisaism of the Publican ; what do you suppose he means ?

* Gather together the inferences you have drawn from the parables about prayer as to the accessibility of God ; and set down the causes which make Him inaccessible, considering whether those causes are of the Divine nature or are entirely in ourselves.

“ To the temple to pray.” Compare this with the teaching in Matt. vi. 5-13. Why was the temple a necessity for the Publican’s prayer ?

* Was the Pharisee sincere ?

V. WRONG RELATIONS TO THE KING.

1. THE TALES OF THE PRINCE'S WEDDING FEAST;
AND OF THE MAN WITHOUT A FESTIVAL ROBE.

Matt. xxii. 1-14.

2. THE TALE OF THE GUESTS WHO WOULD NOT
COME.

Luke xiv. 16-24.

3. THE TALE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

Matt. xxi. 33-44; Mark xii. 1-11;
Luke xx. 9-18.

THE TALE OF THE PRINCE'S WEDDING FEAST.

A certain king gave a banquet in honour of his son's wedding. According to the etiquette which the occasion demanded, he sent messengers at the time appointed to remind those who had accepted the invitations to come to the feast, but all were unwilling to attend.

So a second time he sent out servants with orders to say to the invited guests, "I have prepared the feast; my cattle and fatted stock are killed; everything is ready. Come to the banquet."

His guests treated the summons with contempt; one going off to his farm, another to his business. Finally, some seized his servants, maltreated and killed them.

The enraged king sent his soldiery who slew those murderers and set their city on fire.

Then he said to other servants, "The feast is ready but those who were invited were not deserving. Go into the main highways of my country and invite everyone you can find to the banquet."

The servants went out on the great roads and gathered all the people they could find, whether bad or good.

Thus was the king's banqueting-hall filled with guests for the marriage feast.

When the king entered the hall to see his guests he noticed a man who had not put on the festal robes which the royal wardrobes provided for all. So he said to him, "Comrade, how is it you are here without a wedding-robe?"

The man had nothing to say.

Then said the king to his attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and take him up and fling him out of the palace into the darkness of the night! There let him weep and grind his teeth!"

(For many are called but few are chosen) (Matt. xxii. 1-14).

THERE are two difficulties about the form of this story. The first is its likeness—and unlikeness—to the story of the Great Supper recorded by Luke

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(chap. xiv. 16-24). The second is that the story seems to be two stories conveying distinct and dissociate lessons.

These difficulties may be approached in two ways. We may consider them from the standpoint of Matthew the Evangelist. He has his material; the facts about Jesus summarized in Mark's Gospel and a manuscript containing many of the sayings of Jesus. The latter is a manuscript of the ancient type—solid columns of capital letters with no breaks between paragraphs, or sentences, or even words; and much of it is in the nature of what we call a *précis* rather than a verbatim report. In this manuscript are two stories following each other; both have a marriage feast for their background, and he has to decide whether the second is an independent story or a continuation of the first. If his setting of the story is historically correct—see xxi. 45, 46 and xxii. 15—the immediate occasion of the parable is the hostility of the ecclesiastics at Jerusalem, and verses 11-14 do not seem to have any bearing on this but to be a parable for disciples waiting for the coming of the King and warning them to be ready and equipped for his arrival.

A comparison with Luke's story of the Great Supper throws an interesting light on the personal characteristics of the Evangelists as well as on their several purposes in writing. Luke has said something about his method and purpose in his dedication; both of them write in the light of events which took place after Christ's death. Matthew editing and arranging his material sees in the story a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt.

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xxii. 7) ; Luke is more attracted by the phrases which foreshadow the universalism of the Kingdom and the conversion of the Gentiles (Luke xiv. 23).

Another standpoint from which the apparent fusion of two stories may be considered is that of the Narrator Himself. Assuming Matthew's context to be the correct one, the story is told to a mixed crowd of disciples, ecclesiastics and others at Jerusalem—the same audience has already heard the stories of the Two Sons and of the Wicked Husbandmen. "The Prince's Wedding Feast" tale then follows as a stern warning to the ecclesiastics ; the continuation-story of the Man without a Wedding Garment is added for the sake of the rest of the crowd who may perhaps have betrayed a disposition to conclude that Jesus was proclaiming that the gates of the Kingdom were open to all comers indiscriminately, and could be entered lightly and casually without any serious preparation.

These different standpoints do suggest conflicting theories, but they are not necessarily opposed to one another ; each may help to the understanding of the stories. It is well to remember that the similarities between this parable and the story of the Great Supper are not more numerous than the dissimilarities. It is quite possible that on another occasion Jesus developed the germ of that story which lay in this Wedding Feast tale and gave it a wider application. If so, that is the story preserved in Luke's Gospel where no account of the Prince's Wedding Feast is given. We have at any rate more scope for practical issues if they are discussed separately, and that is the course chosen here.

THE PRINCE'S WEDDING FEAST

The Prince's wedding is a state occasion and the banquet is preceded by the required ceremonial. Invitations have been issued and on the appointed day a messenger of the king's household is sent to give the customary repetition of the invitation. This was in accordance with Oriental etiquette. In the Slavonic version of the *Story of A'hikar* is this passage :

“ My son, if one bid thee to a feast, appear not at the first summons : if he call thee the second time thou wilt see that he esteems thee highly and thou wilt enter his presence with honour.”

Probably in Semitic society from before the time of Christ a second summons was the “ correct thing.”

As the story is addressed, primarily, to the religious leaders of Jewry, the King's Son and the messengers may be taken to refer to Jesus Himself, to John the Baptist and to the prophets.

It is not easy to decide how far the Evangelist supplied editorial links ; the parable does not proceed with the smoothness and ease exhibited in most of the tales of Jesus. The king's comment to his servants that the invited guests were “ not worthy ” falls rather tamely after the statement that he had destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Possibly the Evangelist's knowledge of the fates of John the Baptist and Jesus and of the destruction of Jerusalem has influenced his expansion of the narrative at this point. In this portion of the story the germs of the parable of the Great Supper show clearly through its structure. As it stands its application is mainly—not exclusively—

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to Jewish contemporary history, and to the apathy of the Jewish people. Its messages of warning for our day, on the neglect of privilege and disregard of God's bounty, are practically identical with the Lucan story where the details serve to press them home even more forcefully.

The second portion, or the appendix-parable, is a cautionary tale with a quite different end in view.

Decent regard for a monarch's invitation requires that the guests should don festal array, but the unusual and hurried nature of the invitation might suggest that lack of finery or of time to acquire it would account for the presence of guests in working dress. There is, however, plenty of evidence that Oriental potentates kept large wardrobes and required that guests should wear the royal garments to receive the royal hospitality. The man without a festal robe either considers that such provision is for people less well-dressed than himself, or that his own garb is quite as good as any in the royal robe-chests. When the king speaks to him in friendly fashion, inquiring the reason of his singularity, he is shamed into silence. Sentence of expulsion is pronounced and the man, bound and helpless, is cast into the darkness of the night outside the lighted banqueting-hall.

The second sentence of verse 14, "Many are invited but the choice ones are few," does not seem to be a part of the monarch's speech. It is a saying of Jesus which Matthew has preserved—possibly an old proverb, cf. 2 Esdras viii. 3.

The story depicts the type of man that is willing to

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take the advantages of God's Kingdom, but is unresponsive to its demands upon himself. He who abuses the Divine generosity and love is warned that there is judgment within the Kingdom as well as for "them that are without." On this point the parables of the Tares and the Drag-net also place emphasis.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Look up in a Concordance some of the many metaphorical references to garments and ponder them in the light of this cautionary tale.

* What is the offence of the unmannerly guest, as apart from the form of it indicated in the story ?

Find what Paul has to say about putting-off and putting-on ; and relate his teaching to his Master's.

* *Henry* says, " I don't go to church but I think I am as good as many that do." (*Henry* really means that in his own estimation he is a bit better than many church-goers.) Explain the wedding garment to him.

* Privileges entail obligations. Is discourtesy a moral fault ?

* How does this parable expose the unreality of the orthodoxy of Christ's day ? In what way is the same vice manifested in modern times ?

(Subjects for discussion suggested by the earlier section of the story will be found at the end of the next tale.)

THE TALE OF THE GUESTS WHO WOULD NOT COME.

Once there was a man who was about to give a great feast and he sent invitations to many people.

On the day of the banquet he sent out his servant, according to custom, to say to those who had been invited, "Come, for the feast is ready for you."

And they all began, without exception, to beg off.

The first said: "I have bought a bit of land, and I am obliged to go out and have a look at it. Sorry! I must ask you to excuse me to-night."

Another said: "I have bought a team of ten paired bullocks and I am on my way to try them. Sorry! But you must excuse me."

Yet another said: "I have just got married, so it is impossible for me to come."

The servant returned and reported to his master these refusals.

Then the man grew angry and said to his servant, "Go out at once into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the beggars—the crippled and blind and lame."

Soon the servant reported: "Master, what you ordered is done, but there are still empty seats."

Whereupon his master said, "Go out into the roads, and scour the country lanes, and urge them to come in, that my house may be filled: for I am determined that not one of those gentry I invited shall taste of my banquet" (Luke xiv. 16-24).

REASONS are suggested under the Prince's Wedding Feast for the numerous points of similarity between the Matthæan story and this one. The story of the Great Supper stands here in a very different connection, for in Matthew it is a comment on an attempt to arrest Jesus. There is no reason why our Lord should not have used an illustration more

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than once, nor why He should not have freely adapted His own ideas to different occasions. We may recall a quotation from Prof. J. A. Findlay : " Like all good preachers Jesus repeated Himself ; and like all good preachers He never merely repeated Himself."

Luke has given a careful account of the present occasion. It is an " after-dinner " story at the house of a Jerusalem Pharisee, Jesus being one of the guests. In earlier conversation Jesus had reprehended self-importance and the desire to be the lion of the occasion : He had deprecated the formal " entertaining " amongst social equals and the prescription of a more excellent way is advanced and illustrated by this story. Its immediate cause was the pious platitude of a sanctimonious guest who does the " correct thing " by dragging in an allusion to the Messianic expectation of the day. Jesus shows that it is insincere, like many current expressions of a desire for the Better Land uttered by people who would be " engaged elsewhere " if the chariots of fire were waiting for them. He draws a picture of God's house set in festival array, expectant of joy, but devoid of its guests.

In Matthew we had the story of a great occasion when etiquette and ceremonial would be punctiliously regarded. This is the story of a friendly gathering ; the offence is not mere neglect of the requirements of social etiquette but disregard for the kindly overtures of friendship.

The guests (like the religious of Christ's day, they had all accepted the invitation) find when the festival is actually prepared that the party really

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interferes with immediate pursuits of their own: now that the time has arrived it is rather a bore, and they have discovered other interests that are engaging their attention.

One man has become a landowner and feels of more consequence than when he first accepted the invitation: his reply to the "vocator" is pompously polite—a conventional courtesy hardly veiling the condescending attitude of a man conscious of increasing social importance, to a former friend.

Another is so immersed in business affairs that he no longer recognizes the claims of courtesy, friendship, or his own pledged word.

A third has got married. To the Oriental mind this was symbolic of joy and pleasure, and his "I cannot come" is simply the reflection of the fact that people consider their own enjoyment must take precedence of other obligations—even when a promise has been given.

Behind all the excuses is an indifference to the feast.

Much professed desire for God when pushed to the point of actual communion reveals the fact that it merely cloaks a distaste for His society. God and religion are postponed for prosperity, profit or pleasure. People feel—though they are unwilling to acknowledge the stark fact—that God's invitations come inconveniently. It is not uncommon to hear men regretting that pressure of business affairs and their many social obligations compel them to omit God's work and worship—and friendship (though they do not verbally include the latter). It is a tragic example of the lack of the sense of

GUESTS WHO WOULD NOT COME

humour ; for surely, if men did but reflect they would see the ridiculous discrepancy between their professions and their behaviour.

Men must learn to judge themselves : learn to do so by considering what it is that comes *first* with them. This alone can make it clear what really are religious desires and what are merely pious sentimentalisms.

So shows the Present in this first-century "occasion."

Jesus might have framed His story to depict the discourteous guests as people badly or unlawfully employed. Every excuse offered, however, is something which it is perfectly legitimate to do ; there is nothing culpable about any of the occupations urged as excuses. It is the *absorption* in these things that makes them hindrances, not the things themselves : all might very properly have been done and the acceptance of the invitation also honoured. "Only those who are detached from earthly things and treat them as of small account in comparison with the kingdom of God, will enter therein" (*Plummer*).

The *dénouement* depicts the just indignation of the host and his resolve that none of his defaulting guests, of whom these three were examples (cf. verse 18), should have a further opportunity (verse 24). He goes on with his arrangements ; his invitations are broadcast to all and sundry ; and the new type of guests reminds us of those severe words to the Pharisees : "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom before you."

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Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* The seventh verse of this chapter (Luke xiv.) describes what follows as a parable. Make verses 8-11 into a modern short story, finding contemporary equivalents for the chief seats, and for the exhibition of self-importance.

The target for the parable of the Excuses is not the indifference of the worldly but the insincerity of the religious, shown up by the empty banqueting-hall. Read Jas. i. 22-24. Mirrors, presumably, were invented for seeing one's self : it is not really courteous to use them on other folk as small boys sometimes do. Let this parable be a Mirror of Your-own Street.

* "Sorry I missed the meeting last week, but our tennis-club dance was altered to that night." Speak the truth in love to this member of the study-circle.

* Extract from a Report : "Mr J. in resigning the leadership of the Christian Service Section expressed his great regret at having to do so at such a critical stage in the section's work and said that nothing but the increasing pressure of business would have induced him to take this step." Has the parable any possible bearing on Mr J.'s case ? We are not to judge him ; then what ought we to do for him ?

* The parable draws a contrast between "religion" as prescribed and practised in Christ's day and God's essential requirements. Does this contrast survive in our day ? If so, what form or forms does it take ?

* "Sitting at meat in the Kingdom of God." What does this mean in to-day's life—as fact and not as metaphor ?

THE TALE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

There was once a man of means who laid out some of his land as a vineyard, excavated a wine-press and built a watch-tower as a protection against wandering bands of thieves.

Then he let it out on lease for a period of years to some vine-dressers, agreeing that the rent should be paid in kind, and went abroad for a long time.

Some years later, when the vines were established and the vintage-season had arrived, he sent his servants to the tenants to receive the portion of the crop that was his due as landlord.

The tenants, however, seized his servants, flogged one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent a larger body of servants, but they treated them in the same fashion.

As a last resource he sent his son, saying: "They will show some respect to my son."

But when the men who were in possession of the vineyard saw the son, they said: "This is the heir; he alone stands between us and the full possession of the vineyard. His father won't return for many a long day; perhaps never. Why should we go on doing all the work and not have all the profits? Let us kill him and seize the property."

So they seized their landlord's son, killed him and flung his body out of the vineyard on to the highway.

What will the owner do to those vine-dressers when he returns? He will bring the wretches to a wretched end, and then he will let the property to decent tenants who will respect his rights and pay to him his due share of the crops.

Have you never read that Scripture which says:

"The stone that the builders rejected

Is now the chief corner-stone:

This is the Lord's doing

And a surprise to our eyes?"

(Mark xii. 1-11; Matt. xxi. 33-44; Luke xx. 9-18).

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THIS parable is an extreme example of wrong relations to God ; relations so wrong they can only be regarded as a result of wilful blindness, of a desire not to see or to acknowledge what is due from man to God. It is the severest of all the admonitory tales told by Jesus to the hostile ecclesiastics of Jerusalem ; so pointed that they recognized it was spoken " against " them and were angered accordingly. It was a warning against their long-continued abuse of privileges, and its references can hardly be called " veiled," for the figure employed was familiar to the religious symbolism of Judaism—familiar beyond possibility of misunderstanding.

Many instances are to be found in their religious writings of the use of a vineyard as a symbol of the Jewish people. In the parables of Jesus " field " and " harvest " are employed for thoughts of wider world-significance. The picture of their country, fenced off from other nations, specially guarded and equipped, is an unmistakable representation of Israel. In this vineyard the trouble is not the barrenness of the trees or of the vines ; it is the disloyalty of those who have been put in charge and who have used the position for the furtherance of their own ends until they have manœuvred themselves into a position of bitter hostility to God's will and purpose. The story develops as an indictment of the great churchmen of our Lord's day who have, He says, regarded their priestly position and prerogatives as personal advantages and not as a sacred office held in trust from God. Great churchmen may be as selfish and worldly as other folk, for it is not the sphere which makes work spiritual, but the

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spirit in which it is done. The same applies to service for God in any capacity, however humble.

The indictment becomes more explicit as the story develops. The ill-treatment of the various messengers points unmistakably to Jerusalem, the ecclesiastical head of the nation, as responsible for killing the prophets and stoning God's messengers when sent to her. The sending of the son is an equally unmistakable assertion of His own claim to be in a unique sense the heir of God, and places Jesus above the earlier prophetic messengers. He announces that He knows what they are about to do; and that they also know what they are about to do.

The description of this consummation of their unfaithfulness is followed—this is Luke's version—by a rhetorical question as to the fate of these treacherous and rebellious tenants. Jesus Himself answers with an emphatic warning of their immediate and final destruction. They dismiss the implication with a "God forbid!" as something quite unthinkable. Swiftly He appeals to those Scriptures of which they were the professed custodians and exponents and, in Matthew's account, follows with the rapier's naked point, "God's kingdom shall be taken from *you*."

Were these religious leaders of Jewry quite as abandoned as the parable suggests? It is, of course, obvious that they were at the time trying to entangle Him, to get a charge of rebellion or of sedition which they could substantiate. Perhaps some of them sincerely considered that His influence was a menace to the national life, and so were trying to arrange for His suppression or His removal, or whatever was the

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polite, political equivalent for murder at the time. Consider the attitude of Caiaphas (see John xi. 45-53): "It is expedient that one man should die for the people." As an impersonal political proposition men will assent to things like that who would hesitate at the frank brutality of a prearranged assassination. Just as they will form associations to mitigate the cruelty of horses' harness; and at the same time commission an expedition to wipe out troublesome aborigines.

Certainly the Sanhedrin would have been prepared, as with one voice, to deny that they were deliberately contemplating the slaughter of the long-expected Deliverer, the Hope of Israel. Nothing could be further from their thoughts. The national unrest was profoundly accentuated by these continual pretenders to the Messiahship; and the patience of Rome was wearing thin. As for this Galilean, no serious man could regard Him as having in any way established His claim! "Out of Nazareth!" It was quite unthinkable; and they practically refused to entertain the idea: refused, that is, to think about it. Which is exactly what people have done and are doing continually with their half-formed convictions about the Christ. Persisting in such an attitude, puts men out of relations with God.

This story is recorded in all three Synoptists—possibly they regarded it as the story which cost Jesus His life: the fourth Evangelist has done something to correct this limited perspective of the crisis. The story is substantially the same in all. It is noteworthy, however, that it is Matthew, not

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Luke, who preserves the fateful "I tell you the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation that bears its fruits" (verse 43). This is significant in view of the distinction so frequently drawn between the Matthæan parables of judgment and the Lucan parables of grace. As in the Prince's Wedding Feast (see p. 95) and the Great Supper, Matthew and Luke here show their interest in the historical corroboration of the parable by altering the order of events (compare Matt. xxi. 39 and Luke xx. 15 with Mark xii. 8).

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Read carefully Matt. xxiii. 29-39.

Read also John xi. 45-53.

"God forbid." Is it possible for men so to refuse self-examination that the consequences they consider most to be avoided become inevitable? Can you think of any instances in homely matters? or in history? or any danger of it in your own life?

* These same religious leaders were very zealous for their faith. Jesus describes them as compassing sea and land to make one proselyte—surely missionary enthusiasm is good? and unselfish? What was wrong?

* *The Stumbling-block and the Corner-stone.* Take the comment which is given in Luke xvii. 18, and also in Matt. xxi. 44, though separated from the Old Testament quotation by the final prediction of the fate of Judæa. It has been suggested that we have here fragments of another parable,

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which might conceivably have the title as above. Try to reconstruct it; its scene would obviously be some great building in course of erection and its characters some men engaged in building or masonry.

* Read Isa. v. 1-7, and find reasons for Christ's additions and alterations to the old story.

VI. RIGHT RELATIONS TO THE KING.

1. THE TALE OF THE TWO SONS.
Matt. xxi. 28-32.
2. THE TALE OF THE GENEROUS CREDITOR AND
HIS TWO DEBTORS.
Luke vii. 41-43.
3. HOW THE MASTER THINKS OF HIS MEN,
Luke xii. 35-38;
and
HOW SERVANTS SHOULD THINK OF THEIR WORK,
Luke xvii. 7-10;
and
THE DRUNKEN HOUSE-STEWARD.
Matt. xxiv. 45-51 ; Luke xii. 42-48.
4. THE UNFRUITFUL FIG-TREE.
Luke xiii. 6-9.
5. A TALE OF "WORK FOR ALL" AND THE TRUE
SPIRIT OF SERVICE.
Matt. xx. 1-16.
6. A STORY OF PRINCE ARCHELAUS.
Luke xix. 11-27.
7. THE TALE OF THE THREE TRADERS.
Matt. xxv. 14-30.
8. THE TALE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS.
Matt. xxv. 1-13.

THE TALE OF THE TWO SONS.

“Tell me what you think about the people in this story,” said Jesus to the religious authorities.

“A man who had two sons went to the elder and said, ‘Go, my lad, and work to-day in the vineyard.’ He at once answered, ‘I will, sir.’ But he did not go.

“Going to the second son, the father said the same to him. ‘No, I won’t,’ he answered. Afterwards, however, he changed his mind and went.

“Which of these boys did his father’s will?”

“The latter,” they said.

“And I solemnly assure you,” continued Jesus, “that the toll-collectors and the harlots are going before you into the Kingdom of God. For John showed you the right way and you did not believe him. They did; but not even when you saw that would you change your mind and believe him” (Matt. xxi. 28-32).

THERE is much confusion as to the order of this story in the various manuscripts, the answers of the first and second sons being transposed in the text followed by our Authorized and Revised Versions. In these notes the references to the two sons assume the order of our paraphrase to be correct. The Parable of the Prodigal Son gives another Presentment of a farmer’s two sons and there are points of similarity and contrast between the two stories that should be studied. In each, first impressions are in the Elder Son’s favour. Here he is polite, but really disobedient; in the Lucan story he is obedient but unloving. The Younger Son in the stories is apparently disloyal and disobedient, but the sequel is his vindication at the expense of the

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Elder, whose outward courtesy and consideration of his father's wishes is but a cloak for behaviour entirely disobedient and inconsiderate of his feelings.

The story was told during that last fateful week of our Lord's public ministry in Jerusalem when ecclesiastical hostility was manifest though it still cloaked itself in a professed desire for more satisfactory evidence on behalf of the Messianic claims of Jesus. The official attitude was that they were most anxious for the Messianic era and were waiting to follow the Lord's Anointed, but needed convincing assurance before they could take so serious a step. Jesus' references to the Baptist and the dilemma He presented to them (see verses 24, 25) amounted to a declaration on His part that their anxiety was all a pretence; they had refused to accept John's testimony, they were—and would persist in being—mere sign-seekers, not to be finally persuaded even if one rose from the dead. "This," said Jesus, in effect, "is the piety of mere profession; which is more really disobedient than no profession at all."

Thus far, the story might belong very properly to the stories of Wrong Relations: but its disclosure of the Divine patience with froward children and of their ultimate repentance and amendment points the way to the right relations between God and man. In Matthew religious relationship is usually expressed in terms of service rather than sonship; this story, then, is concerned with the essentially filial nature of man's religious life.

The Elder Son is representative of the respectable

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“religious” folk who are entirely complacent, self-satisfied and—idle! He lets everybody know that he is just about to do exactly what his father wishes; he says all the correct things; he has the *sentiments* of a dutiful and loyal son but never expresses them in action.

The Younger Son is frankly “irreligious.” He is one of those who made no profession of obedience, who had turned their backs on religion. He has his own business interests or pleasures, and is not inclined to put them on one side to obey his father; he refuses to go—and then repents of his unfilial temper and is actually busy in the vineyard whilst the Elder is still talking in pious tones about doing his father’s will.

When Jesus asked which son was really obedient, the high priests and elders replied quite correctly. As with so many folk, their knowledge of what is right was in excess of right action. Most of us know better than we do. Like the lawyer in the discussion of the problem of neighbourliness, we find it easier to give the right answer than to do the right thing.

The son who is outwardly obedient is inwardly rebellious; the will of the father is done by the one who answers rebelliously, but in the depths of his heart is an obedient son.

The application of the story to the immediate occasion was made by the Master. John had said to them, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord”: and they had agreed it was a proper religious sentiment but had done nothing. Therefore tax-gatherers and harlots who have responded to the call to a more brotherly and loving spirit would go into

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God's Kingdom, where such a spirit was a paramount necessity, before the professors.

The parable is the apologia of such as "Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame." Its lesson for all time is "Deeds, not words." Its application is obvious; equally obvious is it that many of us are slow to make the application to our own creeds and religious professions.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

"Go, work." Everyone who professes willingness to serve God needs to examine himself as to whether he is *doing* it or merely talking about doing it.

"Thinking the deed, and not the creed,
Would help men in their utmost need."

Read Matt. vii. 21-23.

* "If all the nominal Christianity now existing could become concrete and actual. if achievement could become co-extensive with profession, we should not have to wait long for the evangelization of the world."—*E. S. Woods*.

Discuss whether this is so.

"If——" But we must not wait for all to change, or the change will never come. Let us see to our own profession, as a preliminary to world-evangelization.

Note that a knowledge of the meaning of God's word is no substitute for doing God's work.

There is no need to "spiritualize" the details and find

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meanings for "work" and "vineyard." Where there is any opportunity to apply the Law of the "Inasmuch" (see Matt. xxv. 40), there is a work for us to do and a vineyard for us to till.

Note that the Younger Son was only obedient when he repented *and went*.

Many people approve of devotion, of service, of brotherliness, of thankfulness. Are an equal number of people devout, serviceable, brotherly and thankful? Is it possible to mistake assent to a proposition for appropriation of it? Is there any personal danger for you?

* Consider afresh Christ's warnings against externalism and decide what are the working laws of the Kingdom which decide our relation thereto.

* Possibly the ecclesiastical leaders understood Jesus better than the mob or than the disciples. They were intelligent men who thought that the people ought to be kept in their place; that privilege was a good thing; that the Jewish hierarchy ought to be safeguarded; that the teaching of Jesus would undermine it. The mob regarded Jesus as a wonder-worker and a good speaker; the disciples, as a lovable man who would be leader of a nationalist movement and bring in God's Kingdom by a miracle.

Find their modern counterparts.

THE TALE OF THE GENEROUS MONEY-LENDER AND HIS TWO DEBTORS.

A money-lender had two debtors; one owed him fifty pounds, the other five.

Because they were both penniless he made them a present of what they owed.

Which of them, do you think, will love him most?

Simon, with a shade of contempt in his manner, answered, "I suppose the one to whom he forgave most."

"You have judged rightly," said Jesus, with grave irony, for Simon had judged and pronounced sentence upon himself

(Luke vii. 41-43).

THE occasion of this parable is all-important for its due appreciation. There is another story (see Matt. xviii. 23ff.) which shows that much forgiveness does not always move to much loving-kindness. The Evangelist tells us of a day when Jesus was a guest at the house of Simon the Pharisee. Eastern customs, such as the casual entry of passers-by into the guest-chamber of a stranger's house, remind us how far removed is much of the background of the Gospel story from our ideas and social life. "The woman that was a sinner"—the phrase is merely a conventional gloss, like our use of "an unfortunate"—belonged to a class that would not, under ordinary circumstances, take advantage of the social courtesy of the open door of a guest-chamber when the host was a man of piety. She has come in because Jesus is there. The inference drawn by Simon is natural enough: either Jesus lacked the insight or the dis-

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crimination which a prophet ought surely to possess, or He knew all about this woman and was "no better than He ought to be."

Jesus "heard the Pharisee thinking," as Augustine puts it, and tells him this little tale of how a man, of a class proverbial for its unattractive qualities, in an unexpectedly charming and kindly way remitted the obligations of two of his creditors; the amount in one case being ten times as much as in the other. He asks Simon which will love the more. The Pharisee rather disdainfully gives the obvious answer, and Jesus agrees with him. He administers a deserved rebuke of the ill-breeding which neglects the courtesies due from host to guest, simply because the latter is a poor man, contrasts the conduct of his host with that of this harlot from the street, and shows Simon that his judgment is a condemnation of himself.

The principle laid down as the moral of the story and of the conduct of the Pharisee and the sinner is "Much forgiveness, much love." There is no suggestion intended of a numerically exact ratio; the principle springs from the contrast between a soul deeply conscious of its need and a soul that is self-satisfied and self-righteous. Such a self-satisfied (and superficial) character results from a life of negations. Notice how the things Simon *did not do* stand in contrast, not to the extravagant devotions of the woman but to "her sins which are many" whose forgiveness has evoked these true courtesies. Jesus says this woman's demonstrations of love to *Him* are proof that she is much forgiven. He is, then, the creditor of His own parable. And He is

THE GENEROUS MONEY-LENDER

content to leave it at that. But the implications are considerable. He leaves it at that, save that He adds “thy faith”—not “thy love”—“hath saved thee.”

The love and gratitude of those who had a present made to them of their debt depends not upon the amount but upon their *estimate* of it—much or little. If forgiveness seems a comparatively small matter then the love it inspires will be a small matter. It is not a proportion-sum, because if we owe all we have we are as large creditors as we can be. Our greatest need is to realize our need of forgiveness.

“I am a sinner, full of doubts and fears;
Make me a humble thing of love and tears.”

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* According to Simon, love varies with indebtedness. Compare this with the story of the Unmerciful Servant. Is it a warrantable inference that if there is no spirit of loving-kindness the forgiveness has disappeared?

“Our love so faint, so cold to Thee,
And Thine to us so great——”

Is there anything that can redress the balance?

* “Much forgiven, much love.” Therefore sin deeply and one day you will love greatly. What is the fallacy?

* A sense of indebtedness does not always provoke love. What more is necessary?

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* “The implications are considerable” (p. 119). Explore them.

* “Modern people are not worrying much about their sins.” “God is no longer thought of as harsh and vengeful.” “Lord, it is my chief complaint, that my love is weak and faint.” Explore these quotations to see if there is any connection, causal or other. Is it not well worth while worrying about one’s sins if that may lead to a fuller apprehension of God’s love ?

THREE SKETCHES OF MASTERS AND SERVANTS.

I. MASTER AND MAN.

"In your service be faithful and vigilant; like men who are ready in their working dress, or who have their lamps alight to escort their master.

"Be like servants waiting for their master's home-coming from a wedding feast—waiting, so that the moment he knocks, the door may be opened to him.

"Happy are those men whom their master finds on the alert at his coming. He will put off his festal attire and, telling them to take the couches round his table, will come and wait on them himself" (Luke xii. 35-38).

2. MAN AND MASTER.

"If you were a farmer with servants out at the plough or tending the sheep, would you say when they come in from the farm-work, 'Come forward and take your places at the table?'

"No! What you would say is, 'Get my dinner ready; tidy yourselves up and wait on me till I have had all I want to eat and drink; then you may sit down and get yours.'

"Does a man thank a servant for obeying his orders?

"So you also, when you have obeyed all your orders, must say to yourselves, 'There is no merit in our service; we are only servants: what we have done is but what we were in duty bound to do'" (Luke xvii. 7-10).

3. THE DRUNKEN HOUSE-STEWARD.

("Be prepared!" said Jesus.

"Do you mean this specially for us, or does it apply to all men?" asked Peter.

Jesus answered:)

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"Well, Peter, who is the reliable and chief servant of the household whom his master will appoint as head over the others to give them their rations at the appointed times?"

"Happy servant is he if when his master arrives he finds him so engaged!"

"But if the head servant says, 'The master won't be back for many a long day,' and begins to beat men-servants and maid-servants, to spend his time eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will arrive unexpectedly some day, at an hour which he never thought of, and will have him put to death, assigning him to the fate of the untrusty."

"The servant who knew what his master's orders were and did not make ready for him will get many strokes of the lash; but the man who was ignorant, yet deserved a thrashing for his ignorance, will get few strokes."

"Much given, much required."

"Great trust demands a corresponding faithfulness" (Matt. xxiv. 45-51; Luke xii. 42-48).

THESE stories are brought together because they are in many respects complementary to one another. The first two sketches are a pair, illustrative of loyal service, one giving the feelings it inspires in the master, the other giving the motives that ought to prompt it in his servants.

It is not easy to see the appropriateness of the context (compare Matt. vi. 21) to which Luke has assigned the first of this pair. It is in some respects a companion-picture to the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. Here, however, the attendants are within the house, the master returns from a friend's wedding he has been attending, and when he stands at the door and knocks they are ready to fling it open and welcome him in. Such vigilant service and glad reception makes for joyous relations, and the master whose servants are so loyal will feel a sense of comradeship—will be ready for the carnival customs indulged in at weddings and other joyous occasions

SKETCHES OF MASTERS AND SERVANTS

(among the Jews, in connection with the Day of Atonement), when masters took the servants' places and servants played for a time at being masters.

Such, says Jesus, will be His feelings towards His followers if He finds them "aye ready."

The companion-picture expounds the same relationship as it should be realized in the servants' hearts. This story, like its counterpart, has no apparent connection with its context. It is difficult to imagine any reason for its position immediately after the saying about faith, which, like other sayings in this section of Luke's Gospel, appears in a different connection in Matthew.

The harshness of the story which has been a frequent source of perplexity largely disappears if we see it as a picture of the attitude of mind and heart proper to God's servants rather than a description of the way God thinks of them and of the spirit in which He will deal with them. Some difficulties would disappear if we could "think back" to a social order in which slavery was an accepted part and parcel of the whole; that is not easy, because the conception of servitude it implies is so repugnant to us.¹ The old principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture is particularly helpful here; we must harmonize our inferences with the constant teaching of Jesus about the Divine fatherliness and remember that His companion-story was given to describe God's feelings towards us.

¹ I have used "servant" frequently where the actual word is "slave." Our ideas are so different from those of our Lord's time. Then, "slave" conveyed predominantly the idea of service; now, it means servitude—a repellent relationship.

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The main lesson should then stand out clearly. The story speaks as if it would be quite unthinkable that He should wait on us : in other words, it warns us against a devotion based upon expectation of reward and reiterates the principle on which so many of the parables dealing with our service and its rewards are based. This is the "high calling" of the Christian. Just as the professional man is only true to his class when he discharges the duties that fall to him for the sake of the profession he has adopted and not for the sake of the emoluments, so the Christian only serves God truly when he recognizes that God's right to his service is without limit ; and that it is service for service' sake, not for reward. We are only slaves, branded slaves of Jesus (Gal. vi. 17), and this should be the spirit of our service.

It does not follow that the harshness suggested by the figure of the slave-owner is descriptive of God ; indeed, we *know* that it is not ; and that from many words of Christ.

The parable sets before us a high ideal of duty ; that, whatever we do, the "utmost" is never overpassed. For all time, here is an unfailing corrective of the spirit for devoted lives. Who does most in the right spirit of service will think no more highly of himself for what he has done. High devotion is only possible to true humility.

Matthew and Luke both give the story of the drunken major-domo in context which points to the future, the latter giving it as a reply to a question from Peter. Roused, perhaps, by the glory suggested in the first story of this trilogy, he wants to

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know whether this is the special honour designed for the Twelve or whether others are included. Christ does not tell him what he wishes to know, but by this story tells him what it concerns him to know : and what it concerns all men to know. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark xiii. 37). That sentence conveyed more to the minds of the men to whom it was first spoken than it conveys to the minds of some who read it to-day. Its spirit is not "Be always on the watch," but "Be always ready, always prepared" : because the day and the hour no one knows.

The picture is of a wealthy Oriental household during its master's absence. A slave who has the position of major-domo abuses his authority, ill-treating the rest of the household slaves who have been set under his management and spending his time in drunken orgies. His master's unexpected return reveals the full extent of his delinquencies and he is handed over to the executioners to share the merited fate of the untrustworthy (the unfortunate mistranslation, "unbelievers," has been responsible for the introduction of theological deductions which have no proper place here). One or two cautionary maxims, suggested by the discipline usual in such a household are added.

Two of the three stories centre round a coming of the master of the household at an hour not previously known to his servants. To many these parables suggest that our Lord is thinking of what is rather strangely termed His "Second Coming." This is a subject with a vast literature of its own. As the whole emphasis of these stories is upon the

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paramount duty of present faithfulness, we may leave most of these considerations on one side, keeping in mind one or two general facts for our guidance. The essential idea of the word *Parousia* is the Presence rather than the Coming (cf. 1 Cor. xvi. 17; 2 Cor. x. 10. Matt. xxiv. requires to be studied in connection with the teaching in John xv., xvi.). The tenor of the apocalyptic chapters of the first three Gospels certainly suggests that the Fall of Jerusalem was a "coming" of Christ. He "came again" at the Resurrection; and in a very true sense He may be said to "come" in the crises of history—whether that be the history of nations or of our individual lives. The underlying idea in these stories of the Master's is clearly that of a presence which manifests itself, but may be missed if we are unprepared; and its warning is that we are not to miss the teaching of life's happenings by being "unprepared" for the Lord's Presence so manifested.

Our safeguard in all crises of life, whether national or individual, is to be faithful to the duties of the present hour.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* Much attention has rightly been drawn to Jesus' humble earthly circumstances. Trace examples in His stories of His knowledge of the ways and etiquette of the upper classes. Consider from what sources He drew this knowledge. Correct, if necessary, your mental picture of Oriental life. Make sure you do not read into the story of Jesus too much of

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the modern vulgar materialism which is supposed to indicate social grades.

Read Browning's *The Statue and the Bust*. Do you agree with his conclusion ?

“ The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Was, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a crime, I say,
You of the virtue (we issue join),
How strive you ? *De te, fabula !* ”

* Make a collection of passages where the motive for service is given as “for My sake.” Relate them to these stories.

* Collect what Paul says about his life's motive. He calls himself “an apostle,” “a slave,” “the chief of sinners.” Does his view of life harmonize with Christ's ?

* In connection with the first story read John xiii. 1-17. Does it teach the same lesson ? Or was it simply a lesson in humility ? Or are these two things, vigilance and humility inseparably connected ?

In the same connection also, study Rev. iii. 20, 21.

THE UNFRUITFUL FIG-TREE.

A man who had a fig-tree growing in his vineyard came several times to look for figs upon it and never found any.

At last, tired of successive disappointments, he said one day to his gardener, "For the past three years I've kept on coming to this tree, looking for figs and never finding any. Cut it down! Why do you leave it to take up so much room and use up good soil?"

"Leave it another year, sir," suggested the gardener. "I'll trench round its roots and give it a good dressing of manure. Then if it bears fruit next year, well and good. If not, you can give the order and I will cut it down" (Luke xiii. 6-9).

THE context assigned to this story by Luke is something like this :

Two disasters, or "special judgments" that were in folk's minds were referred to by our Lord (cf. xiii. 1-5) and, without discussing the question of their penal character, He said that something of a like nature would befall the Jewish nation if it did not come to a better mind. We have noted before (see the Wicked Husbandmen) that the vineyard is a favourite Scriptural figure for the Jewish people (cf. also Isa. v. 1-7; Hos. ix. 10; Joel i. 7); and the story may be an immediate warning to them. If so, the same warning is available and necessary on a more universal scale. God requires every life to serve a useful purpose; every man occupies some special position which brings its own special obligations, and to discharge those should be his immediate

THE UNFRUITFUL FIG-TREE

aim in life. If it is not, his life will fail of its special purpose, and that is not merely an individual concern, for any fig-tree in a vineyard that does not produce fruit "cumbers the ground," takes up space and impoverishes the soil whose true nature is to be fruitful (cf. the Seed Growing Secretly). The gardener's counsel of patience and his desire to do everything possible for the tree can only have one logical issue. If there is still no fruit, then the tree must be cut down (cf. the Tares and the Rich Fool). It is, then, a picture of the inevitable penalty to be paid by a useless life.

Mr J. C. Flower (*The Parables of Jesus*) considers that the context is entirely irrelevant and that the only way to find a satisfactory meaning for the parable is to consider other references of our Lord to trees, choosing for this the pictures of Matt. vii. 16-20. He would regard the tree as a symbol of man's continual effort to achieve some end that seems to him good. The owner is such a man. He wants fruit. If he cannot find what he wants he says, "Get rid of the tree." The wise old gardener counsels more patience and cultivation. And the moral of the story is Be gardeners, not merely spectators. The "moral" is to be applied to our human impatience with institutions, laws and principles which do not immediately achieve the ends we desire.

This certainly gets rid of some difficulties but it also creates others. We may have avoided the problem of identifying the owner and the gardener. We have also avoided the gardener's conclusion and a few facts concerning fruit-trees and barren stocks

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that cannot be ignored in practical fruit-culture—even in the interests of education by development.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* The parable speaks of a failure in the essential purpose in life—for the essential purpose of a fig-tree to the ordinary man is figs. Has God an *essential* purpose for us? Have you considered what that purpose is? Is it in harmony with our essential nature?

* Having considered these questions compare your answers with the Beatitudes. Where did Jesus find such men as he says are blessed? They do not describe what we are like—at least, not many of us. Do they describe what we would like to be? Is it possible that they do show life's essential purpose? Could you define it?

This fig-tree is described as being in a specially favoured position; it has special advantages. Most of us consider we have special disadvantages. Is that a correct view?

* See Rom. xi. 22, “the goodness and severity of God.” To this, says one, the parable is related. *Is* it severity?

* Compare the story with Amos vi. 1-6. Discuss whether the parable may be taken as referring to Jesus' own ministry, whether He thought of His work as in some ways resembling that of a Hebrew prophet who tries to save his nation from the doom of disobedience.

A TALE OF "WORK FOR ALL" AND THE TRUE SPIRIT OF SERVICE.

A vine-grower went out early one morning to try and hire labourers for his vineyard. It was at a season when there was much work to be done. He found some men, day-labourers, in the village market-place and when they had agreed to go to work for five shillings a day he sent them into his vineyard.

Going out again about nine o'clock, he saw others hanging about the market-place unemployed, and he said to them, "Go to my vineyard, you fellows, and I will give you a fair wage."

So they went.

The pressure of work was very urgent and he went out again about twelve o'clock, and yet again about three o'clock, and said the like to men whom he found waiting there.

At five o'clock he found some men still hanging around and he said to them, "Why do you loiter about here all the day doing nothing?"

They told him, "It is because no man has given us a job."

So he said to them also, "Go into the vineyard."

At six o'clock the grower said to his overseer, "Call the men and pay the wage, beginning with the last lot and finishing with the first."

When the men who had only put in an hour's work came for their pay they got five shillings each.

Then those who began work at six o'clock in the morning reckoned that they would get more. But when their turn came they got five shillings each. At that they grumbled against the grower, saying, "This last lot have only put in one hour's work and you have given as much to them as to us. We have had to stand all the toil of the day's work and the blazing heat of the midday!"

The vine-grower answered their spokesman and said, "Comrade, I am not unjust to you. Did you not strike a bargain with me for five shillings a day? It's a good wage and you know it. Take your money and go. It pleases me to give to these last the same as to you. Can't I do as I like with my own money? Or are you envious because I am good-natured about it?"

"Last first, first last" (Matt. xx. 1-16).

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THE break in the narrative caused by the insertion of chapter-divisions is a little misleading here. We should read straight on from the epigram, "Many who are first shall be last, and many who are last shall be first. Therefore God's Kingdom is like——"

This epigram which introduces and concludes the parable is called forth by Peter's question, "What shall we have?" And that question is occasioned by the interview with the rich young ruler and Christ's comments which followed it.

Peter had not grasped the fact that it was his loving trust in Christ that was making him; that the love and trust which are the essence of sacrifice are also the essence of service.

The Evangelist has accounted for the utterance of this parable very fully and naturally, and it is in the perspective which his narrative gives that we shall most readily learn its lesson.

Its main purpose is to contrast the bargaining spirit of the world, of which Peter has, unwittingly, given an instance, with the trustful spirit of service required by the Kingdom from its subjects.

The tale deals with a busy season in the grape-growing industry, possibly the ingathering of the grapes, and a grower engages some day-labourers at the beginning of the day, agreeing to pay at the usual rate. During the course of the day the grower goes again and again to seek more hands. With these he makes no bargain, only undertaking to do what is right; and with that they are content.

At the end of the day the men are paid; those who have only been one hour get a day's wage; those who at the beginning of the day covenanted for a day's

“WORK FOR ALL”

wage get it, and are disappointed, having begun to expect that they would get more in proportion as they had been at work all day.

This disappointment was quite natural but not justifiable. All sorts of attempts have been made to explain away the apparent discrepancy between fairness and generosity, or, as an alternative solution, to construct communistic theories of work and wages and claim for them our Lord's benediction.

The discrepancy is only apparent. Jesus was not dealing with economics ; and most of these attempts simply obscure the lesson that Jesus sought to enforce, viz. that sacrifice ceases to be sacrifice if it is made in a bargaining spirit : and that, as the bargaining spirit is lower in principle, so it is poorer in results.

This may be made more plain if we consider the grades of labourers of whom nothing is said. There were three grades of short-time workers ; we are only told what happened to one lot—the last of all. We do not know whether the men who worked for three hours who also went into the vineyard without making any bargain were paid three times as much as the men who had only been there one hour. We are told, however, that one hour of trustful service was worth as much in the grower's esteem as a whole day of work done for pay at a stipulated rate. “ Beginning with this last ” does not imply that the others intermediate between the one-hour workers and the twelve-hour bargainers got more than the one-hour men in proportion to their time of labour. The old-time theologians, busily engaged in making everything “ evangelical ” stamped the word “ Salvation ” on the penny and eloquently defended eleventh-hour

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conversions, death-bed repentances and so on. A natural reaction from that school of interpretation said that as there was "no wrong" done to the bargainers, there must be "no wrong" done to those who trusted, and therefore they would be paid proportionately. So we get back to another form of the very error against which the parable should put us on our guard !

The moral of these many perplexities seems to be that it is not safe to draw inferences from details outside the lesson which the story is avowedly intended to illustrate : and that lesson is that God appreciates the spirit rather than the amount of the service we render. The question of varying reward for trustful service according to the length of time of that trustful service does not come in. It may or may not be true that God so differentiates. So far as we are concerned, there is an immediate call for service : "The harvest is plenteous and the labourers are few." There is "work for all," and our concern is to do that work from right motives.

We are not told that the making of the agreement was a wrong thing. That is not commented upon. We are merely told how it works out. Certain men made a bargain and got what they bargained for ; then they became envious of others who had made no bargain and received a generous pay from the employer equal to their day's wage. The grower was just to all ; he was generous where he willed. Then the men who worked in a bargaining spirit reveal their essential interior weakness of spirit. They are shown to be of a grudging disposition. They had worked out of no love for the work, with no desire to

“WORK FOR ALL”

serve another, but from a spirit of envy ; and this is revealed when sundown comes. They had gone to work because it would pay them to do so, and they had fixed their own wage ; all their interest was in transferring money from the grower's pocket to their own. Work for pay, you get your pay : work for goodwill, you get goodwill.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Consider the implication that all outside the vineyard is idleness.

God is a just Paymaster ; we shall get our penny a day if that is what we are working for. Consider the motive of your service. As a “Christian duty” ? To set a good example ? To make your influence felt ? To ensure a good reputation ? To satisfy your self-esteem ? Or——?

* Read the statement in the former part of 1 Cor. xiii. on great and good works, immense learning, unlimited charities, willing martyrdom. By the help of this parable arrive at a satisfactory corrective.

* What is the motive that ought to govern service ? If anyone says it is a motive they are never conscious of, or that it does not appeal to them, is there any helpful answer to make ?

The Real Problem :

“ Lord of the vineyard, Whose dear word declares
Our one hour's labour as the day's shall be ;
What coin divine can make our wage as theirs
Who had the morning joy of work for Thee ? ”

* Discuss Ruskin's argument in *Unto This Last* and decide whether you approve of it.

A STORY OF PRINCE ARCHELAUS

When Prince Archelaus went to Rome to ask that under his father's will he might receive his dominions as a vassal of Cæsar Augustus, he thought that he would need some dependable men on his return to act as governors under him. So he called ten of his household people and gave five pounds to each of them saying, "Carry on business with this until I return."

His citizens, you remember, hated him and sent a deputation to the Cæsar to say, "We do not wish this man to be our ruler."

On his return, after he had received royal powers, he summoned the servants to whom he had entrusted moneys that he might learn what business they had done.

The first who appeared before him said, "Sire, your five pounds has made a profit ten times over and has gained fifty pounds."

"Splendid!" cried the prince. "You are the right sort of servant! In this small matter you have proved yourself entirely trustworthy. I appoint you governor of ten towns."

A second man came forward and said, "Your five pounds, Sire, has made a profit five times over and has gained twenty-five pounds."

To him the prince said in like manner, "I appoint you governor of five towns."

Another came and said, "Sire, here is your five pounds. I have been keeping it carefully wrapped up, for I was afraid of you because you are such a hard man. You want to pick up something where you have never put anything down, and to reap where you have never sowed."

Archelaus replied, "I will sentence you out of your own mouth, you worthless fellow! You say you knew that I was a hard man; that I want to pick up something where I have never put anything down, and to reap where I have never sowed. Why, then, did you not put my money on a banker's table so that on my return I could have claimed it with interest for the loan?"

Then he said to his bodyguard, "Take away the five pounds from him and give it to the one who has made fifty."

"But, Sire," said they, "he has fifty already!"

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"I tell you," he replied, "that is the way of the world. The man who has, gets more ; but the man who neglects to use his chance loses what he has.

"Now, as to those enemies of mine, the men who would not have me to rule over them. Bring them here and put them to death in my presence" (Luke xix. 11-27).

THIS story, told very possibly in after-dinner conversation at Zacchæus' house, would have a special appositiveness for a Jericho audience. Archelaus had lived at Jericho and built a splendid palace there for himself.

This man was the elder of the two sons of Herod the Great, and Judæa was bequeathed to him. A rebellion broke out in Jerusalem ; in quelling it his soldiers massacred some thousands of Jews at the time of the first passover in his reign. Archelaus proceeded to Rome to obtain from the emperor a confirmation of the bequest ; but a counter-petition was presented by a delegation of eighty Jews, beseeching Augustus to free them from the Idumæan princes and expressing a preference for union with Syria to such rulership. The Cæsar, however, finally awarded him the kingdom with the title of "ethnarch," not of "king."

This agrees very closely with the reference of verse 14. The awards to the faithful servants and verse 27 agree with the history, for he bestowed cities on his loyal supporters as a reward on his return from Rome and, according to Josephus, sought vengeance against his enemies. Apart from this history, verses 14 and 27 seem rather irrelevant details. At the time when the story was told Archelaus was living in Gaul, whither he had been

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banished some years previously by the emperor because of his many acts of violence and tyranny.

Luke says that this parable was spoken because they were getting near to Jerusalem and some of the disciples supposed that the manifestation of God's Kingdom was imminent. It certainly links on to the declaration about the coming of the Son of Man in verse 10, which may have quickened their expectations of a visible and catastrophic advent of the Messianic era.

Whether there was any historical foundation for the testing of Archelaus' servants or no we have no evidence. Nor is it in any way material. The same idea is used again on a different scale in the parable of the Three Traders. To avoid needless repetition it may be well to confine our attention to the points which have here another emphasis. The underlying general principle of both stories is the necessity of making the best use of what is entrusted to us.

Ten of the prince's household were selected for the testing of their capacity, and the results in three cases are given as typical. A small sum sufficed for this test, and a like amount was placed in each man's hands. They were ordered to carry on business with it until their master's return.

Much has been made of the contrast between the two stories—equal opportunities in the one; unequal opportunities in the other. It has been pointed out that the successful traders begin with unequal opportunities and end with equal rewards, whilst the successful servants of the prince begin with equal opportunities and end with unequal rewards. All this seems a little beside the mark.

A STORY OF PRINCE ARCHELAUS

The prince was professedly seeking to pick his men, and to make this fairly easy he gave the same test to all of them. He wanted to discover the most suitable men for responsible office and to grade them according to their fitness ; and he eventually assigned authority to the men proportioned to the fitness they showed. It is questionable whether the problems of "equality of opportunity" or of "equality of reward" rightly belong to either parable. Certainly, in this present story there is an immediate reason for the equal amounts and the point is not so much the nature or proportion of the opportunity as the varying use made of the opportunity. The prince sought to know what business they had done, with what industry and ability his capital had been handled. A favourite maxim of our Lord's (verse 26 ; cf. Matt. xiii. 12 ; Mark iv. 25 ; Luke viii. 18), which recurs in various connections, is here put into the prince's mouth and may be taken as summarizing the central teaching of the story. This is, that if men neglect to use their gifts they lose them, but if they make the most of them they gain others. It is the law of all intelligent and efficient service in all departments of human activity ; and it is applied to the Kingdom whose principles Jesus insisted are neither magical nor startling but in harmony with the Divine mind and method as revealed in the world.

This statement recurs again in even more emphatic form as the conclusion of the parable of the Talents ; but there the distinction is more broadly drawn and is only between use and non-use. There, ability is estimated before responsibility is assigned ; and the

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distinction is between those who used and the one who neglected to use his opportunity. In this story responsibility is assigned to enable ability to be rightly appraised, and opportunity for service is afforded in accordance with the results obtained ; where the servant has failed to make any use—the case is identical with that of the slothful trader—of his opportunity, he is considered to have shown himself unfit for further service.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* “Carry on till I come.” Why is there no superannuation in Christ’s service ?

* “Who has, gets more.” Is there anything unfair about this ? It is only true if he who has uses what he has. Does that make it more reasonable ? Think of it in relation to knowledge, to virtue, to work rather than cash in order to get a true perspective.

* Was the prince’s test a fair one ? Remembering that he was not burning to reward his men but simply to secure good service, was it a good test ?

The sons of Zebedee heard this story. Did they remember their request at the Cross when other men were “One on His right hand and one on His left,” I wonder ? What lesson did they learn ? Look up their subsequent history.

“Life is an opportunity for service ; not as little as we dare, but as much as we can.”—*B. F. Westcott.*

THE TALE OF THE THREE TRADERS.

There was once a rich man who had decided to go abroad for a long time. So he called together bondmen whom he employed in his business undertakings and handed over to them his capital. To one man he gave two thousand pounds, to another eight hundred, to a third four hundred—to each according to the business ability he had shown. Then he set off on his travels.

The man to whom he had entrusted two thousand pounds got to work and traded with it, doubling his capital. So also did the man who had received eight hundred.

But the man to whom four hundred pounds had been entrusted went off and dug a hole in which he hid his master's money.

After a long time the master returned and went into their accounts with these men.

The man who had received two thousand pounds came up and brought two thousand more. "Sir," said he, "you gave into my care two thousand pounds. If you will count this over you will see that I have made another two thousand."

"Splendid! my good and trustworthy servant!" said his master. "You have proved yourself reliable in little things: enter into the joy of your master! Be a master yourself and a slave no more!"

In like manner he who had eight hundred pounds reported and gave in sixteen hundred: and in like manner was he greeted and rewarded.

Then came the man who had received four hundred pounds.

"Sir," said he, "I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered. So, fearing lest anything should go amiss, I carefully concealed your four hundred pounds in the ground. See, here is your money!"

"You good-for-nothing, lazy slave!" answered his master, "you knew, forsooth, that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered! Then you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers and I would have received my own with interest on my return.

"Take away his four hundred and give it to the man who has four thousand. For to him who has, more will be given and he shall have abundance. But as for the man who acts as though he were

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responsible for nothing, why, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

"This worthless slave shall not spoil our feast. Fling him out into the darkness! There let him howl and grind his teeth!" (Matt. xxv. 14-30).

MATTHEW connects this story with the counsel which follows the story of the Ten Bridesmaids—Be prepared. If this context is correct the chief emphasis of its teaching must be connected with that standpoint.

The relation of the parable to the Story of Archelaus is very evident. It is a repetition on another occasion of the same general ideas, but not a mere repetition. The one is an account of how a ruler picked his administrators; this considers the question of opportunity from the standpoint of servants and their discharge of service.

It was a usual practice in the East to employ slaves in business. These men are such. They do business for their master (compare the Unjust Steward), who entrusts to them varying sums of money, a "talent" to the third and more to the others. This parable has given the word "talent" to the English language, and we must not forget that its metaphor has now a concrete meaning in our speech near allied to ability. The amount allotted to each man was according to his master's estimate of his ability, and the "talent" was the opportunity for the ability already there. Each gets what he can handle. Many men who can handle a small business would soon be ruined if they had responsibilities beyond their scope. The tasks assigned to men are the tasks to which they are suited; they are not tasked beyond their strength.

THE TALE OF THE THREE TRADERS

The analogy fails, as all analogies must, to set forth completely our Divine relationship. So far as we are concerned our abilities, as well as our "talents" are bestowed. We do not know why they vary; why one man has ten, another one. But we can see it is so. It is, of course, considered clever to talk as if the world were topsy-turvy, to speak as if it were the obvious commonplace of human society that worth is trodden underfoot and incompetence honoured and promoted. As a matter of fact, the parable is a truer picture than the cynic's. Most people who think that they need a change of fortune, really need a change of resolution.

Two of the traders are successful, each to the full measure of his opportunity. They are, justly, equally rewarded, for they have done equally well. Both realize the duty of taking risks with what they have for their master's service. True service requires that men live in the spirit of venture, hazarding all for their Master's ends; wealth, abilities, career—whatever it is that has been entrusted to them. Good servants recognize that it is entrusted to them for use. "Heaven is but a noble company of venturers for Christ" (Rutherford's *Letters*).

The reward—the term is not adequate, and imports suggestions that were better left out unless we are on our guard against unworthy motives—is spoken of as Rulership: that is, enlargement and authority, greater freedom and greater responsibility; a place at the master's table instead of waiting behind his couch. The "reward" for usefulness is greater opportunity for usefulness: and the man who has the widest field of service is, com-

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paratively, only given a chance to be "faithful in a few things."

The lowest grade is a trader to whom a comparatively small capital has been allotted. He is unfaithful to his task (note in the case of the others that it is their faithfulness, more than their success, on which their master sets store). He is unfaithful because he gives up his job, considering it a hard and thankless task. This is the peculiar temptation of men who have not any outstanding ability; of the "average" man. Because a man cannot shine, he will not do what he can. He refuses to help because he cannot lead; will not do a little thing because he cannot do a great thing. He might have put his lord's money "to the exchangers"—for if there is nothing else a man can do he can put himself under someone else and obey orders. There are plenty of great works to which men may attach themselves for God's service. All have some capacity to further their master's interests—if they will. If they will not; well, then, the property must pass from those who will not use it rightly to the man who will.

Behind all this lies the great law of Spiritual Capital as some have called it. It is in reality the application in the spiritual realm of what is known in the physical realm as the Law of the Conversion of Energy. Life is not something to be hoarded and cherished but to be put to the great Exchange, to be hazarded, as the Elizabethan adventurer staked his fortunes and his person on his perilous voyages in uncharted seas. Life so invested for Another's service grows and is enriched. It were easy to

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illustrate that in every department of human activity and endeavour this Law of the Conversion of Energy has to be obeyed, or the original impulse lost. Perhaps the most profitable thing for our day would be to meditate upon its truth in relation to faith, the primal energy of the soul. For here, as elsewhere, unused potentialities will dwindle and disappear.

Behind the failure to serve lies the tragic misunderstanding: "I knew thee—a hard man." Service comes from love and loyalty (Matt. vi. 24), such as is only possible to those who can say "We knew thee, that thou art not a hard man." We have not touched Jesus' deepest motive in this tale until we realize that He is concerned with men's views of God. In work, and in life, *everything depends on what we think of God*. This is the "lesson of lessons" in the school of Christ; man's character is shaped and the quality of his service determined by his conception of the Divine nature.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* "According to his ability." Would it be kind to give any man more than he could manage? Is it possible to improve one's ability?

* Which man took the biggest risks? When we talk about venturing for Christ, whose capital is it we put to the venture? Think rather thoroughly about this and discuss it.

If the investment of one's life in a venture for Christ is a failure, consider on whom the ultimate loss falls. Consider also what life is given us for. Relate the implications

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of this parable to the sayings about loving life and losing it. Are any guarantees given? Is the security adequate? Can you find better security?

Probably the one-talent man said to himself, "Why did not I have five talents?" Envy and sulkiness are contributory causes of idleness. Help the people of moderate ability—"the most of us"—to a better spirit.

Faithfulness. Think about it. Is it beyond our compass?

"The fundamental evil of modern industrialism is that it encourages competition for private gain, instead of co-operation for public service."—*Archbishops' "Inquiry,"* 1919.

"When you are doing all you can you are doing all you ought."—*G. S. Arundale.*

"Do the thing and you shall have the power: but they who do not the thing have not the power."—*R. W. Emerson.*

"Dare to live dangerously."—*Nietzsche.*

"The thought of God fills me so full of life that I want to go and do something for everybody."—*George MacDonald.*

THE TALE OF THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS.

At a certain wedding ten girl-friends of the bride were invited to join the procession and go to the marriage feast.

When the night came, they went out with their lamps to meet the bridegroom and the bride.

Five of them were prudent maidens and took a reserve of oil to replenish their lamps if it should be necessary. The other five never gave a thought to this.

The bridal party was a long time before it returned from the bride's home, and all the girls grew very drowsy and fell asleep. Suddenly, at midnight, there was a commotion and they awakened to cries of "The bridegroom is coming!" "Come out to meet the bridegroom!"

So all ten bestirred themselves and taking up their lamps began to trim them. The thoughtless five said to their prudent comrades, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

But the prudent ones replied, "There may not be enough for us and you. The procession isn't here yet. You had better go to the oil-sellers and buy for yourselves."

While they were away buying oil, the bridal procession came up and the five prudent maidens, joining the escort, went on to the marriage feast. All went in and the doors were shut.

Presently the thoughtless ones came back from the oil-sellers and said, "Oh, sir! Sir! Open the door for us!"

But the bridegroom said, "Truly, I don't know you."

Be always prepared, then; for you do not know the day or the hour (Matt. xxv. 1-13).

POSSIBLY no story of the Master's has been so ingeniously—and variously—expounded in its details as this. The numbers, the lamps, the vessels, the oil, are all the happy hunting-ground of symbolical interpreters. Calvin said that the peril of such expositions is that it often overlooks the main lesson—

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that "it is not enough to have a lively zeal for a while. We must also have a perseverance that never tires." But the main lesson is a preparedness that never tires ; when that thought is our own the details may be considered in their actual relation to that lesson.

Though the story is simple enough, it deals with customs so different from ours that a brief survey of them may serve as a useful background for the scenes depicted.

A Syrian wedding was celebrated at night. Its principal ceremony was the removal of the bride from her home to the bridegroom's house. Late in the evening he set out, accompanied by his groomsmen as torch-bearers (and usually with a band of hired musicians). At the bride's home the party was met by the bride and her friends—bridesmaids, we should call them—in gala dress and with their lamps on poles. The party then proceeded to the bridegroom's house where the wedding feast was spread.

It is to the group of waiting maidens that the story directs our attention. They have been waiting a long time and the bridegroom's appearance has been delayed. When at last the distant lights of the approaching procession cause a stir of excitement, five discover that they have brought no oil for the replenishment of their lamps which are beginning to go out. Whilst they seek to remedy their neglect the procession passes on, and when at last they arrive at the house they find the bridal feast has begun and the doors are closed against them.

The object of the story is evidently to illustrate

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something by the contrast between the two groups of bridesmaids. This contrast is between a prudent preparation which is always ready and a hasty, ill-considered preparation which may fail at the moment when most needed. All were equally on the watch, but all were not equally ready. All "drooped their heads and slept," as the Anglo-Saxon version translated it; but five had made all possible preparation beforehand.

The story belongs to people already attached to the Kingdom and its admonition is especially for them. Do not assume that the glow and fervour of love, the vividness of faith, the serenity of a surrendered heart will remain as a permanent "light in darkness" without attention or care. The spiritual life requires culture and replenishment from its proper source.

The wise companions can give good advice, but character cannot be acquired at second hand; it has to be achieved by our own exertions. It is foolishness, not wickedness that is reprehended; the folly that assumes there will always be plenty of time to get ready.

Opportunity passes by those who are not prepared to avail themselves of it. The cry outside the closed door is not a cry of fear but of bitter disappointment; it is a cry for the gaiety they may not share, the friends they may not greet. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you"; yet a time comes when one may knock in vain. "Give to him that asketh of you, and from him that would borrow of you turn not away"; but there are things that can neither be lent nor borrowed.

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Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

If you want to do right, how much time will you give to consideration of your conduct for the day ?

A busy man who worked late was counselled by a friend to rest a little later in the morning. He replied, "I find I have so much to do, that I have to spend more time over my morning communion to get through my day."

* What do the three stories in Matt. xxv. teach concerning death ?

"In whatsoever employments I may surprise you, in these also will I judge you."—*Saying of Jesus from Justin's Dialogue with Trypho.*

* Were the foolish ones eventually admitted to the feast ?

* "To live so that no crisis-hour will find us unprepared." Is there any kind of forethought which will suffice for this ? Is a spirit of expectation a proper and sufficient preparation ?

VII. RIGHT RELATIONS TO OUR FELLOWS.

1. THE TALE OF THE KING'S RECKONING.

Matt. xviii. 23-35.

2. THE TALE OF THE MAN WHO ADMINISTERED AN UNJUST SYSTEM.

Luke xvi. 1-13.

3. THE TALE OF THE THOUGHTLESS RICH MAN.

Luke xvi. 19-31.

4. THE TALE OF THE SUCCESSFUL EGOIST.

Luke xii. 16-21.

5. THE TALE OF THE NEIGHBOURLY STRANGER.

Luke x. 30-37.

THE TALE OF THE KING'S RECKONING.

In the matter of forgiveness God's Kingdom may be likened to a man—a king who determined to have a reckoning with his officials who administered the royal revenues.

No sooner had he begun to look into things than he commanded the attendance of a minister in a position of great trust whose accounts showed a deficiency of something over two millions sterling.

When it was evident that he could not produce the money, the king ordered that the man himself, his wife, his children, and every stick that he possessed should be brought under the hammer to pay the debt.

The minister thereupon bowed his forehead to the ground before the king, and, embracing his knees and kissing his feet, besought him saying :

"Mercy, my lord the king! Bear with me! Give me time and I will repay every penny!"

The monarch, moved with compassion, ordered him to be set free and cancelled all the debt.

Now this same minister went out from the king's presence and found a fellow-servant who owed him about five pounds.

"Pay me every stiver you owe me!" he demanded, and growing very excited about it, he lost his temper completely, seized the poor fellow by the throat and half-choked him, trying to drag him to prison.

His fellow-servant, falling upon his face before him, implored him, saying :

"Bear with me! Give me time and I will repay you."

He would not listen to him, but cast him into prison to be kept there until the debt was discharged.

Some others of the king's ministers saw what was going on and were very much upset. So they went and gave an account of it all to the king.

Then the king called that minister to his presence-chamber and said to him :

"You evil-hearted wretch, I forgave you all that debt when you

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humbled yourself and entreated my favour at my feet! Was it not the least that you could do to have a fellow-feeling for your fellow-servant, even as I had a fellow-feeling for you?"

In royal rage his master handed him over to the torturers, to be kept in prison and punished until all his debt was discharged.

Like this will my Father, God, deal with you if you do not forgive, each one of you, his brother from your hearts (Matt. xviii. 23-35).

THE occasion of this story is Peter's question about forgiveness. Rabbinical decisions said a man should be forgiven three times: Peter suggests seven times; seven being the Jewish "round number" completing the circle. Jesus' reply is, in effect, "When you have completed the circle, begin again; and again." "Until seventy times seven" is practically equivalent to "without limit." It is the Law of Unlimited Forgiveness.

The standard seems so exacting that some have sought relief in the context—the rules about wrongdoers which immediately precede and apparently occasion Peter's question. They find, with satisfaction, that one is not required to forgive an impenitent person. But the prescriptions say that one is required to do all that is possible to bring such a one to a state of penitence—which is a harder task still. And when we know the worst about our failure in this task and the offender is to be "as a pagan and a publican," we are still Christ's disciples and have to love pagans and publicans.

It is the *Kingdom* which is likened to this story. No parable more requires us to remember that the comparison instituted is essentially one of relations and not of things or persons. God's forgiveness is not to be measured by the extravagant severity, or the equally extravagant leniency, of this eastern

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despot. The phrase "a man, a king," misrepresented in our English version by "a certain king," is one which is common in Midrash parables to make it clear that an earthly king, a king of flesh and blood, and not God, is intended.

The Kingdom of God, not God Himself, is so likened because the Christian society is designed to be held together by the inward disposition of each member to forgive and be on brotherly terms with every other member. Disciples are not isolated individuals but members one of another; and "war among the members" means incalculable damage and limitation to the functioning, health and activity of the whole body. Until this merciful spirit, this team-spirit (cf. Matt. v. 7), obtains among us we are scarcely to be considered citizens of the Christian Kingdom, for we lack the distinctive spirit of citizenship.

The great sum of money is estimated variously by various writers but is certainly well over two millions sterling of our currency at pre-war standards. It represents a kingdom's revenues, and is set over against a debt equivalent to a labourer's three months' wages. It seems an exaggerated sum, but any human comparison which is to represent the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness *must* seem exaggerated. It is something "broader than the measure of man's mind." The discrepancy between the moneys makes it clear that we are concerned with the relative importance of our great debt to our Lord and our little debts to one another.

The "moral" of the story is conveyed in Christ's

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comment (verse 35). It is not that those who have nothing to offer for God's free grace ought to be very lenient to those who offend against themselves. It is that God's forgiveness itself is a living thing, a seed not to be received on wayside, or rocky ground, or among thorns, but in the good soil of a "broken and a contrite heart," where it will bring forth its proper fruit in life. The change in the king's attitude is only an apparent change. The defaulting minister was not really touched by the remission of his tremendous debt. He sought "mercy" not to use it as an active grace of life but from a simple desire to escape the consequences of his own wrongdoing. Mercy is, for him, only a good thing so long as he is the object of it. He has no sense of "the bundle of life," in which we are all bound together, no realization of that "team-spirit" which is the essence of mercifulness. The lesson is not that God refuses to forgive us under certain circumstances but, to put it bluntly, that His forgiveness is good seed wasted unless we receive it in honest and good hearts (verse 35, "*from your hearts*"), where it can bring forth fruit. The man whose heart is still hard though so greatly forgiven is not being as his heavenly Father (Matt. v. 48); he is outside that fellowship with God which is the very soul of the experience of forgiveness.

Salvation, as it is evangelically called, consists in being reconciled to God and to our brother-man. Forgiveness is not a passive state but an active ferment that makes for forgivingness in life's actual relationships. If God's forgiveness does not

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make our hearts tender ; if we do not receive it into our hearts as a living seed to transmute the soil there into larger life ; if we merely count on it, but do not actually receive it, a travesty of religion results. There are people of whom we say that they are good but so hard ; we feel they would be more human if they had no religion at all—really, they have not the Christian religion.

The angry king's comment on the contrasted amounts is a subsidiary detail which has a direct bearing upon the lesson enforced : an unforgiving spirit is a crime which carries within its breast its own Nemesis. A man whose misappropriation of a kingdom's revenue has been condoned will surely not count coppers when he is the creditor ! Yet it is in the small things that men often find forgiveness difficult. The damaging story that has been set afloat concerning us ; the patronizing attitude (for which we are indignantly sure there is no justification !) ; all treatment that makes us feel small—these are quite as difficult problems as matters that seem more vital. There are some instinctive antagonisms ; folk who are sure to take the opposite side in everything—opinions, politics and what not ; and to forgive people for being unreasonable is sometimes harder than to forgive an actual injury. A sense of perspective is essential to life. How much more we have been forgiven than we are ever called upon to forgive.

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Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* “*My Father.*” Why not “*Your heavenly Father*”? Consider whether the refusal of forgiveness to another does not logically exclude us from sonship and its implications.

Peter’s “seven times” is another example of the desire for rules because we are so slow to grasp principles. See Luke x. 29, and find some more illustrations for yourself from the Gospels. Find also evidence that Peter did eventually grasp the principle.

* Why does any inhuman action seem worse if done by a professed Christian? Is it worse?

* Debt is measured by obligation. If you have never had any goods from the shopkeeper you don’t owe him anything. Is that true? Is it the whole truth?

Find the passages in the Sermon on the Mount which this parable illustrates.

* Note v. 23: the Kingdom is likened. *The Logician* says, “This, then, unfolds the method of the Divine government; not the particular method of dealing with individual souls.” Consider this carefully and set down your reasons for agreeing, or disagreeing with it.

* The “team-spirit” which is the essence of mercifulness. Does this apply to the mercifulness of God? Is He “at-one” with us? Does He desire to be? See God in Jesus Christ if you would answer these questions.

“Let us see that whenever we have failed to be loving we have also failed to be wise; that whenever we have

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been blind to our neighbour's interests we have also been blind to our own ; whenever we have hurt others we have hurt ourselves much more."—*C. Kingsley*.

"The thought of the love of God cannot be grasped in the slightest degree, even as a working hypothesis, by a man who does not know human love."—*Elbert Hubbard*.

"Make my forgiveness downright—such as I
Should perish if I did not have from Thee ;
I let the wrong go, withered up and dry,
Cursed with divine forgetfulness in me."

George MacDonald.

THE TALE OF THE STEWARD WHO ADMINISTERED AN UNJUST SYSTEM.

There was once a rich money-lender who had a steward, or agent, to manage his business. The agent had no salary but, as was customary, assessed the profits on the loan as high as possible, paying the rich man and making as much as he could for himself.

Behind his back someone reported to his master that the steward was neglecting his affairs and doing his work in slovenly fashion. So his master summoned him and said :

"What is this tale that I hear about you? Make up your books and present your accounts for I have decided to dismiss you."

The steward, turning the matter over in his mind, said to himself :
"Whatever shall I do? It's a certainty that the master is going to take the stewardship away from me. I am too old to begin at the bottom again ; hard work doesn't suit me, and I can't stomach the idea of having to beg. Ha ! I know what I will do ! I can scheme things so that when I am turned out of my job there will be some folk who will give me hospitality and house-room."

So he called all his master's debtors to him. To the first he said :

"How much do you owe to my master?"

"Eight hundred gallons of oil," he replied.

"Here, take a note of hand," said the steward, "and sit down at once and make it out for four hundred."

Another one he asked :

"How much do you owe?"

"Five hundred sacks of corn," replied the man.

"Make out a note for four hundred," said he.

Going on in this way he was able to present to his master securities for moneys advanced, and by knocking off the commissions he had imposed for himself he formed a circle of farmers who were under obligations to him.

When the rich man heard of it, he praised the steward for his shrewdness.

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"The men of the world are more astute in looking after their own interests and know the men with whom they have to deal better than the children of Light.

"So I say to you, Friendship is the best of all investments. Make friends for yourselves while you are stewards in this present unequal social order. All men are stewards under notice. When the system breaks down—as it must some day for each and every one of us—your friends will have hospitality ready for you in the Tents of Eternity.

"He who is trusty in trifles is also trusty in big things, and he who is dishonest in trifles is dishonest in big things.

"If then you are not trusty in the mammon so often ill-gotten, who will ever trust you with true riches?

"And if you cannot be trusted to handle a loan, who can hand over your inheritance to your care?

"No slave can be at the disposal of two masters at the same time : if he does not hate the one and love the other, he will at any rate hold on to the one and betray his lack of respect for the other. It is impossible for you to be devoted to the service of God and the pursuit of worldly advantage at the same time" (Luke xvi. 1-13).

It is impossible to decide whether the collection of maxims which follow this parable were all of them spoken at the same time. Genuine sayings of Jesus, they may have been occasioned by the tale, or their presence in this connection may be due to the Evangelist's arrangement of material for which he desired to find a suitable context. Compare, for example, verses 9 and 13 with Matt. vi. 20 and 24. Their value is the same in either case, of course ; but the interpretation of the parable's main lesson, to which some of these may be subsidiary, depends in part upon the view taken of their connection with it. The inference that in the pursuit of spiritual interests we ought to imitate the prudence of the worldly man is clear enough. Of other conclusions here drawn the reader must use his own judgment.

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The story is a scene from Syrian life in Christ's day, and some difficulties may arise from failure to appreciate its setting in a different social order with relationships between employer and employed that are not easily paralleled in our own time.

It was told to a company of disciples, probably for the sake of some of the rich tax-collectors among them, by way of counsel in the use of money. To such men it would be full of interest and point as an observant transcript from the business life with its doubtful transactions in which many of them had been engaged. It is still a story for wide-awake business men.

In modern times the nearest equivalent to the rich man may be found in the money-lending class in agrarian districts of the Indian Empire; men who advance money for seed to the cultivators in consideration of a lien upon their crops. As the Jew was not permitted by his religion to practise usury in dealings with his fellow-countrymen a Gentile agent or a slave was employed. These men grew rich by extorting additional commissions for themselves, a practice winked at or recognized by their principals.

It is an everyday story of a lazy servant who did his work in slovenly fashion, kept no accounts and was quite untrustworthy, but became lively and alert enough when his master's eye was upon him. He could not render his accounts, for he had neglected to keep them, and had to ask the various debtors the amounts of their obligations. (It is of interest to note that the Syriac version

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has “*He* sat down and wrote.” Ordinary people were not all able to read and write.) The “bills” were notes of hand for moneys, seed or other advances for which a stipulated amount of produce was to be given at harvest. This steward had no such bills, but knew his verbal arrangements with the men included a considerable margin for himself. Whilst he hastily prepared a balance sheet with vouchers and notes as ordered by his master, he knocked off these heavy commissions as the debtors signed their bonds. Thus he put the farmers under a sense of obligation and could count upon a “blackmail” hospitality for himself in the future; at the same time he provided the documents which showed his reported losses were covered by adequate securities.

His master appreciated his business acumen—he had nothing to say about the morality of the transaction, perhaps a matter of indifference to him. The man had been sagacious and prompt in handling a difficult situation: he had faced the inevitable, determined to extract something for himself out of it, and had shown good pluck and resourcefulness. Praise for a rascal’s smartness need not mean sanction of his rascality.

This speculative agent was a familiar figure of the time and the audience would enjoy the tale of the shrewd way in which he turned an apparently hopeless situation into one of profit to himself. If there were tax-collectors like Zacchæus (cf. xv. 1)—men who grew rich by extortions—among the hearers of the story, we can see its appropriateness; Zacchæus had made restitution of his extor-

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tions and Jesus by this tale is saying how wisely he has used the wealth at his command.

Verses 9-14 are comment on the story, the connection in verse 9 being very close. The use of the word "mammon" in verse 9 may have been the reason why other maxims are placed here: it is a Syrian word and means simply Money personified, as we often personify it in conversation (cf. "Money talks!"). It is called "unjust" possibly because many to whom and of whom Jesus spoke made theirs by "unjust" methods: they are reminded that when made it is as little theirs as was the money entrusted to the steward.

The story ended with verse 8. Forgetfulness of this has caused needless perplexities for folk who fail to distinguish between the recital of immoral acts and approval of them. Up to this point we have no expression of the views of Jesus; simply the tale He tells to His audience, and all that it reveals of the Master is that He was a keen observer of the life around Him. There is nothing to sanction the idea that ill-gotten gain can be turned to good account. The trader-banker was merely a well-known figure of Semitic life and his agent a type to be found in all the country districts.

Jesus' own comment on the story is that it illustrates the fact that worldly-wise men look upon friendship as a good investment; and this view of theirs is sound. This is in harmony with His own teaching given on many occasions: "Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth" (Matt. vi. 19), and His counsel to the rich young man (Mark x. 21),

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are immediate instances. This is the wisdom that the Sons of the Kingdom will need; they must be alert, as was the steward, to use present opportunities to provide for the future. Note the "in *your own* interest." The steward arranged for a home for a time; the same may be done for eternity. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." The astonished righteous are told that they had befriended the poor and needy and these were representatives of Jesus (Matt. xxv. 40), and therefore well worth having as friends.

Helps for Meditation or Discussion.

* Worldly-wise men say, Make friends with those above you, if you can: Jesus emphasizes friendliness towards those who are one's social inferiors, or who are less well off. Trace other examples of this in His teaching.

* Think out three ways of applying this where intellectual ability is one's chief possession. Apply the principle for one whose interests are artistic and literary, for a successful merchant, for a struggling professional man, for one with strong social instincts, for a day-labourer.

Look through James' Epistle and note passages which show that he has assimilated his Master's teaching.

"The steward was not unrighteous because he mismanaged the estate, nor because he kept part of the rents to himself (that was understood to be his rightful perquisite, nor would his master have 'praised' him, if he had himself been adversely affected by the interviews with the

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two tenants); but because the whole organization typified by the relation of landlord, steward and tenants was radically wrong.”—Findlay, *Jesus As They Saw Him*, p. 162.

Shall *we* have to give an account? Prepare yours for audit, up-to-date, and give a fair opinion on it as if you were your own auditor.

“Make use of your opportunities.” “I am doing so,” you say. What use are you making of them for your own benefit? Is the benefit absolutely secured, remembering that death and taxes come to all?

* “The love of money is the root of all evil, but the possession of it is an opportunity of much good.”—*Dods*. Do you believe (*i.e.* live by) this? It contains two statements; probe them carefully before you answer.

“Opportunity needs greatness in a man to use it greatly.”

* “The true riches” (verse 11). Then money isn’t wealth. What is? If money isn’t wealth, what is it? What does Jesus consider it to be? (See Ruskin in *Unto This Last*.)

* Modernize this parable, taking as characters the General Manager of a multiple-shop company and a Branch Manager, or the Headmaster of a school and the Master of a Junior Form, or a Lady of Position and her Housekeeper, or—any two persons suggested by your knowledge or experience. Apply diligently the appendix of comments.

THE TALE OF THE THOUGHTLESS RICH MAN.

There was once a rich man who dressed in the height of fashion and lived luxuriously. He wore costly clothes of purple hue, and his underwear was linen spun from the purest Egyptian flax. He was merry every day, for he had five brothers for company and they feasted on the best of everything.

There was also a poor man called El'azar who lay at the rich man's gate. He was very ill, and his body was covered with ulcers. He asked nothing better of life than to appease his hunger with the waste from the rich man's table, but he did not get enough for that. The street-curs that also sought the broken meats used to come and lick his sores and he was too helpless to drive them away.

In the course of time the poor man died and his soul was carried by the angels to the Bosom of Abraham.

The rich man also died and he had a fine funeral.

In the Place of Spirits, where his existence was one ceaseless misery, the rich man raised his eyes to try and discover where he was. He saw Abraham a very long way off and El'azar reclining next to him at the Feast of Paradise.

So he shouted, "Father Abraham, do one of your sons a good turn and send El'azar, just to dip his finger-tip in water, and cool my tongue; for I suffer horribly in this flame."

"Remember, my child," replied Father Abraham, "you received in full your share of the good things you believed in whilst you were on earth. You used them for your own pleasure and stored up nothing for the future. El'azar on earth had only evil things, and his was a hard time of it. Here the account is balanced: he is well cared for and you get your share of suffering. Your pleasure was undisturbed by his pains; his bliss must not be broken now by your bane.

"In all these things that have taken place, a great chasm has been made, and remains immutably fixed between us and you. The barrier you did not trouble to remove before, you cannot remove now. So if any were willing to cross over from us to you, they may not do so: still less can any cross over from where you are to us."

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Then the rich man said, "I pray you, Father Abraham, send El'azar to my father's house—for I have five brothers there—that he may convince them of the true state of affairs, so that they do not come to this horrible torment."

To which Father Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."

"Nay, Father Abraham," said he, "that is not enough. But if one from the dead should journey to them they would be aroused to a new mind."

"If, as matters now stand," replied Father Abraham, "they turn a deaf ear to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 19-31).

THE comments of Jesus on the tale of the Unjust Steward were received with sneers by some in His audience. They were money-lovers, we are told, and probably considered that they had long ago seen this tendency on the part of those who had no money to find grave fault with those who were better off. "The grapes are sour!" they said in their hearts.

In the story of the Steward, Jesus had shown that good results would follow if a man would but make a wise use of his immediate opportunities. In this story He shows that failure or refusal to make a wise use leads to most disastrous results. It is a further emphasis on the dangers to which wealth exposes a man. There is no condemnation of wealth as such. Neither here nor elsewhere does Jesus suggest that it is unlawful to be rich; but here and in many other places He remarks on its perils.

This story has two scenes, apparently far apart and sharply contrasted: but it is of the essence of its teaching that this separation and contrast are only apparent. There is no real breach. In

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the case of each of the *dramatis personæ* the second scene portrays the same life continued under altered conditions.

The first scene is familiar enough to some of the audience. The life of a wealthy Syrian Jew is depicted. He lives in a fine house, enjoys the best of everything, dresses well and keeps a generous table. An ordinary, decent sort of fellow, well-off, surrounded by the comforts of life. There is no hint that these things were dishonestly acquired. He was free-handed, probably, or El'azar would not have been laid at his gateway. His condition, not his character, is the purport of the description. Similarly, it is the condition, not the character, of the poor man that is described by way of contrast. His name, El'azar ("Helped of God") is given. This is the only time our Lord gives a name to a character in a story. Lying unheeded at the rich man's gate, his condition is as wretched as the other's is luxurious.

The second scene also is familiar to His audience. It is in Hades, the current popular conception of Ghost-land, which includes Gehenna and Paradise. Our Lord simply makes use of this popular conception without affirming or denying its details. As His stories are made of fiction as well as fact and are made in order to illustrate or enforce a definite truth, there is no profit to be gained by digressing therefrom in the application of the mechanism of the story. Human nature's un-failing curiosity concerning the life to come has caused a natural but unprofitable concentration upon the details—the topography, so to speak—

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of this second scene. Let us keep in mind that Jesus merely reproduces the popular ideas current in His day concerning the spirit-world and they were not calculated to arouse any particular discussion or to divert attention from the point of the parable.

“That Jesus constructed a parable out of heathen ideas then held by the Jews, or at least some of them, is no proof of those ideas, nor that He meant to give them His approval.”

It is not the purpose of the parable to give information about the unseen world, but to enforce the general principle that is of gravest moment in any thought about it—that condition hereafter is determined by conduct here.

This second scene, then, presents us with an absolute contrast in the case of both El'azar and the rich man. El'azar is represented as welcomed with the demonstrative hospitality of Syria, where household servants will receive the traveller as he dismounts and, literally, carry him into his host's presence. The lonely, neglected pauper now enjoys the best of company, sitting at his host's side as his intimate friend.¹ The rich man, however, is alone: no reception has been accorded him, and presently, in his loneliness and misery he looks around to try and ascertain his whereabouts. Wealth, prosperity, cannot command conditions for him now; they are determined by the character he has formed, and by that alone. He has had his good things, the only good things he knew. Having lost these, he has lost every-

¹ Cf. John xiii. 23, 25.

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thing. The consequences of a pleasure-seeking life, centring on self, cannot be evaded as soon as they become distasteful or distressing. When he seeks for some alleviation—even the very slightest, the moistened finger-tip of the happy El'azar, will be a boon—he is told that he has had his good things in full settlement already. In his earth-life he built no bridge of sympathy and brotherliness between himself and El'azar, so now there is no means of communion possible.

Compunction awakens in the rich man. He is concerned for his brothers who are living as he had done and he asks that El'azar may be sent to warn them. But this is refused on the ground that if they will give no heed to the religious counsels at their disposal they will not attend if a visitant from the world of spirits were to return to them. Men absorbed in material interests will be blind and deaf to the intimations of immortality. That is the peril of wealth. It blinds men by the material comforts it can command to life's possibilities; to the enrichments that a spirit of ever-widening sympathy with one's fellows affords; and when the soul passes out from material conditions it fails those who trusted in it. The story, indeed, brings home the warning of the tale of the Steward; it sets the certain "failure" of mammon before those who had scoffed at that story because they were "lovers of money."

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Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* This parable has been cited to establish Christ's condemnation of the wealthy and His laudation of poverty. Examine carefully whether this is so and set down the points from which you draw your conclusions.

* Compare the attitude of the Unjust Steward to the debtors with that of the rich man to El'azar. What is the teaching that underlies both these stories ?

* The complete reversal of conditions seems a little hard on the rich man. Father Abraham says it is both just and inevitable. Consider his reasons.

* What about men who say they have a pretty busy sort of life and no time to think much and so "Leave these guesses about Heaven and Hell to the church-goers" ?

* If it is so vitally important to believe in the life of the world to come, why do we not have indisputable evidence, communications, etc. ? Is Father Abraham's answer satisfactory ? Is it true to the facts of human nature ?

* Would any "manifestation" help you to believe ? (A study-circle must be careful not to wander too far from the track by discussing modern spiritualism.)

Is it quite fair that a decent, jolly, well-to-do sort of fellow who never thought about these things should experience such a violent reverse of fortune ? What brought it upon him ?

* Collate three passages in which our Lord deals with the peril of riches. Examine them to see whether it is

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fair to say that the peril in His eyes is that they militate against real brotherhood.

The parable has been interpreted as if El'azar means the Jewish nation, the five brothers and Dives the oppressive Herods, and so on for all its details. It has also been freely used as a *proof* of future rewards and punishments—but these constitute the parable itself. Note the fallacy underlying such a “proof.” Keep it in mind for other parables also.

“People fare badly only because they themselves live badly.”—*Tolstoy*.

“Heaven is just a meeting and a homing of our real selves. God will never make us into new personalities.”—*Mary Slessor*.

THE TALE OF THE SUCCESSFUL EGOIST.

Once there was a rich farmer who had a succession of abundant harvests. He debated with himself (for he was a man who made no friends and kept to himself),

"What is the best thing to do now? With such splendid harvests I have no barns big enough to store my crops?"

"This is what I will do," said he to himself at last. "I will set to work at once and pull down my storehouses. I will build bigger ones and in them I will gather together my corn and all my goods. And I will say to myself, 'You ought to be settling down, old man; you have enough to keep you well supplied for many years. Take plenty to eat and plenty to drink! Enjoy yourself and be merry!'"

GOD said to him, "You foolish man! This very night they are asking for you! And the things which you have got ready—whose shall they be?"

Thus it is when a man hoards for himself and is not rich as God reckons wealth—in affection for other folk (Luke xii. 16-21).

JESUS' words about appearing before magistrates prompted someone in the crowd to ask Him to act as arbitrator in a family dispute. Our Lord's refusal was accompanied by a warning against covetousness which is expounded by this story. In the warning are two points. First, that a life worth living does not depend on money (cf. verse 15), which may be a very considerable anxiety to its owner and occupy far too much of his attention; and, second, that money cannot even secure existence. The positive inferences to be made are that life depends for its value on the use made of possessions, for its prolongation, upon the will of God.

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It is the tale of a prosperous farmer embarrassed by his prosperity. There is no suggestion that his wealth was unjustly acquired; but his life is quite self-centred. He talks "with himself"—a morbid condition which is frequently noted in Luke's Gospel. Simon the Pharisee, the Unjust Judge, the Unjust Steward, the Pharisee at Prayer all betray their abnormal egotistic condition in this way. Like the ape in Kipling's story, they have "too much ego in their cosmos!" This man is only capable, apparently, of thinking in terms of self-interest—*my* crops, *my* barns, *my* goods, *my* soul.

He does not consider that other folk's affairs in any way concern him; what he might do for others never crosses his mind: he has no desire to discuss his favourable situation with any other person; nor does he propose to share his good fortune with any: he talks to himself, not caring for other company. The plans he makes are all for himself. He speaks of his soul, not as contrasted with his bodily existence but as the Self which is the centre of all his considerations.

No sooner are his plans for a good time perfected than a dramatic entrance changes the situation. An uninvited, unexpected, unthought-of Guest appears at his side: God summons him and he has to obey. "They" are asking for him, says God. Who are they? ¹ Who but the Others

¹ Scholars disagree about the use of the "impersonal plural." Moulton finds it common for epistolary purposes in the papyri: if this is a parallel use we ought to translate "You are wanted." Robertson, however, notes that it is sometimes used on purpose to conceal the identity of the person referred to (cf. Matt. ii, 20, of Herod the Great).

THE TALE OF THE SUCCESSFUL EGOIST

whom this Rich Fool has always left out of his thoughts and plans ?

There is irony and pathos in the picture. The man who needed nobody to talk to but himself has to go and meet those for whose company he never cared ; he has to realize the utter precariousness of the wealth which he considered his own. He does not even know now whose it is. And he goes to a world where none of his money is current coin.

As in the Steward's story the underlying note is the necessity of friendly relations, of the importance of fellowship to life. It is a warning against the folly of living aloof from one's fellows, of "keeping one's self to one's self," as the colloquialism has it.

This story might have been included in the section on Wrong Relations to the King, but it is a story of no relations at all and the point seems rather that a man who has lived selfishly as regards his fellows has also lived selfishly as regards God. This "Fool" may not have said in his heart, There is no God, but his manner of life has ignored God and man. All are bound up in the "bundle of life." The getting of wealth without regard of God or man is covetousness ; and covetousness is senselessness ("Thou fool").

Luke follows with warnings against anxiety for material things and seems to suggest that they were spoken on the same occasion but he does not say so. These warnings form a section of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew ; they may, however, have been spoken more than once.

THE STORIES OF THE KINGDOM

Helps for Meditation or Discussion.

* "Suppose all earthly possessions were suddenly to drop from about you, as they one day will, what would you have left? Would you then be rich or poor? Would the wants you would then begin to feel be amply provided for?"—*Dr Marcus Dods.*

Ps. xxxix. 6. Jas. v. 3. Do you agree with the Psalmist? Do you devote your life accordingly?

* The Rich Fool's problem was "Where shall I bestow my goods?" Can you offer him a satisfactory answer?

"God" is a surprise to this man's little world. But whose world is it? Then what ought he to have done?

* "You can't afford to be altruistic in business. Business must be every man for himself." Must it? Is it good business, then?

"What I saved I lost, what I spent I had, what I gave I have."

"Whose shall these things be?"—when there are plenty of possessions but no *life* left?

* An Aim in Life. To get on? To make money? People often choose these obvious goals. Are they a real aim? An aim *in life*? And if they are achieved, what then? Is Jesus right about the peril attending such aims?

"To be the centre of one's universe is misery."—*Donald Hankey.*

"Half the world is on the wrong scent in the pursuit of happiness. They think it consists in having and getting and being served by others. It consists in giving and in serving others."—*Henry Drummond.*

THE TALE OF THE NEIGHBOURLY STRANGER.

A man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho was set upon by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, and when he struggled to keep them, clubbed him on the head and made off; leaving him senseless.

By a coincidence a priest was going down the same road. Seeing the man lying there unconscious, he crossed over and passed by on the other side. So did a Levite who came down to the place; he looked at him and then passed by on the other side.

A Samaritan, however, who was on a business round, came upon him, and when he saw him was at once touched with concern: he went to him and bound up his wounds, dressing them with oil and wine. Then he placed him on his own mule and, walking by his side, took him to an inn of the better sort, sat up with him and looked after him. At daybreak, going out of the room so as not to be seen by the wounded man, he took a couple of florins from his purse and gave them to the innkeeper saying,

"Look well after him and do not trouble him about money. Whatever you may spend more I will repay to you on my return journey."

"Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbour to the man who fell in with the robbers?"

The lawyer said, "He who stood by him."

Jesus said, "Go, and act yourself in like fashion"
(Luke x. 30-37).

THE problems of conduct and of theology raised by the study and application of the law were of perennial interest to the Jews. The lawyers were men whose business was the interpretation of the ancient law, and one of them on this occasion propounds a question calculated to make clear the central teaching of Jesus and afford an opening for debate: "What am I to do to inherit eternal

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life ? ” “ Surely,” says Jesus in reply, “ a lawyer knows the law ! What is written there ? ” When the correct reply is given the Master agrees with a quiet emphasis of His own, “ Thou hast *answered* right ; this *do* and thou shalt live.”

So direct a thrust was hardly expected ; but it was fairly probable that Jesus would stand by the fundamental proposition of Holy Writ. This, then, was but a preliminary crossing of swords, and forthwith the lawyer propounds what he considers the real dilemma—“ Who is my neighbour ? ” Orthodoxy had already defined the term so as to exclude Samaritans and Gentiles, and so far as the lawyer was concerned the whole problem was prejudged.

This tale is Jesus’ reply by which He seeks to disarm his questioner’s prejudice and elevate his judgment. It is the tale—whether fact or fiction matters not—of a Jew travelling down from Jerusalem by the Jericho road. It may be the tale of a pious Galilean who has been to the Holy City for the fulfilment of a religious vow and makes the well-known detour by this ill-omened road in order to avoid passing through Samaria on his homeward way lest alien soil should defile the feet that have so lately stood “ within thy walls, O Jerusalem.”

Half of his journey is accomplished in safety : ¹

¹ Tristram says of this story that the scene is unmistakably about half-way from Jerusalem to Jericho where lies the deep gorge of the Wady Kelt, its sides honeycombed by caves which are, from of old, a brigands’ fastness. So many dark deeds has it witnessed that the way is known as the Bloody Road. Sharp turns of the road and projecting rocks afford good cover and a safe retreat for the footpads that once infested it. Cf. Tristram, *Eastern Customs*.

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then in the lonely defile of the Wady Kelt he is set upon by a gang of roughs. In the sudden shock of their onset he struggles, is clubbed into unconsciousness and, stripped of his garments, left lying in the road, half-dead, whilst his assailants make good their escape.

Bellarmino, a learned Roman Catholic expositor, says it was not without reason that the Lord in that parable describes the victim as first stripped and then wounded, because it is the loss of original righteousness that is the cause of all our troubles. Upon this he builds up a controversial theological argument. But the fact is that a man's clothes often constituted the chief spoil and the robbers tried to secure these without the damage and depreciation caused by struggle and wounds. Because the man naturally tried to keep his clothes violence was added to robbery and he was stunned.

As he lay there, says the Story-teller, by a coincidence (not "by chance." Our Lord's view of life has no place for chance; "your Father knows," "your Father cares" for all things) a priest travelling that road sees the body lying there and draws aside; a Levite also comes along and passes by. Is the body lying there a dead man? It were well not to inquire too curiously, for a priest dare not touch a corpse (Lev. xxi. 1); a Levite has to keep himself from defilement for the service of the temple.

To such a pass officialism soon comes that the very reason for the existence of the office becomes a reason for the neglect of that office's primal duty. These men, each in his several capacity,

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were representatives of Jehovah the Compassionate ; and the priest is the official friend of all Jews, whatever their tribe ; for that he was set apart.

They pass out of sight and out of the story. There comes along, not a compassionate Jewish layman but a Samaritan on a business journey. He sees no ceremonial problem, no racial question, but a fellow-creature in sore straits : one for whom the "luck of the road" has turned out ill that day. Fellow-feeling stirs within him at once and all other emotions are merged in a flood of compassion. His journey, his own affairs, his own risk of being attacked ; all are out of mind for the time. For the wounded Jew "a charitable Samaritan is worth more than a priest without charity" (*Loisy*). He dresses his wounds, sets him on his own ass and trudges by its side till they reach a comfortable inn. At daybreak next morning (the Greek is "towards the morrow"), for natives of the east make an early start when travelling, he takes the landlord aside, gives him money, and makes himself responsible for any further needs of his fellow wayfarer.

"Who is my neighbour?" asked the lawyer. Jesus by this story has enlarged the scope of the question. It is one not to be approached in so narrow a spirit as the query implies. "To whom can I show myself neighbourly?" is a truer outlook. The neighbour-spirit does not ask, What claim, if any, has this man on me? but rather, What can I do for this fellow-creature? The lawyer's reply to the Master's question is an admission—a grudging one, for he cannot bring himself

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to mention the "Samaritan"—that a kindly heart knows of itself the definition of a neighbour. It is not a definition of the word "neighbour" that is wanted but the neighbour-spirit. That will make its own definition. A compassionate heart is a better expositor than any dialectician; it is of greater worth to human betterment than any obligations of office, or race, or kinship. None of these ties make a man so keen in detecting neighbourship as does a loving disposition. For such a spirit, "Who needs me is my neighbour." This is surely the crown of Christ's teaching on friendliness :

"I knew that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls on earth."

The universalism of Jesus is a love that knows no limits of race, that asks no questions but gives itself in loving service. It is our business as Christians to make it universal. The last word is, "Go, and do thou likewise."

If we must speak by the card, the lawyer's question remains unanswered. He might consider that for a Samaritan to succour a Jew was a privilege for one of that inferior faith! He might want to ask, Should a Jew be expected to succour a Samaritan? Is the official decision to be revised so that Samaritans and Gentiles are included? He might reasonably say that he did not ask how to act towards a neighbour, but how to know who that neighbour is. The lesson of the story is that we cannot decide whether a man is a neighbour by any limitations of churchmanship or country or race. A

THE STORIES OF THE KINGDOM

kind heart finds a neighbour in every man to whom it can minister. Priest and Levite would have distinct claims under any of the proposed limitations, but they were not proved neighbours: the Samaritan has no title to respect except his simple goodness of heart. Instinctively the Christian Church has found the right word and named him the "Good" Samaritan. Such goodness is the one foundation of all true fellowship. Wherever we see love to God or to man governing a man's conduct there is a neighbour, a brother.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* Is Christianity a general, indiscriminating love? Or ought we not to recognize who are the most lovable people on whom to fix our strongest affections? These affections do much to mould our lives; should they not be thoughtfully directed?

* For Jew and Samaritan substitute Buddhist and Christian: what light does this throw on the world-mission of the follower of Christ?

"Whoever possesses this world's goods, and notices his brother in need, and shuts his heart against him, how can love to God remain in him? My dear children, let us put our love not into words or into talk but into deeds, and make it real" (1 John iii. 17, 18, Moffatt's Translation).

* If a Jewish priest was the official "friend" of all Jews, what is the official rank of a Christian?

"Love people, and see what comes of it."

TALE OF THE NEIGHBOURLY STRANGER

The Samaritan was a missionary in a foreign country (where he was not a popular figure) ; the society that commissioned him was his own heart ; the Gospel he preached was one of deeds. No word of his to the man he saved is recorded ; but his *doing* was the man's salvation.

“ We are not born for ourselves, but for our kind, for our neighbours.”—*Cardinal Newman*.

* “ There can be want only in a society of men who live according to the animal law of struggling against one another.”—*Tolstoy*. What is the higher law ?

“ Thou shalt share all things with thy neighbour, and shalt not say that they are thine own property ; for if you are sharers in the things which cannot pass away, how much more in those that can ? ”—*St Basil*.

“ Blessed is he who loves Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thy sake.”—*St Augustine*.

VIII. HOW THE KINGDOM IS DEFINED.

1. THE WEEDS.

Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43.

2. THE DRAG-NET.

Matt. xiii. 47-50.

3. A PICTURE OF JUDGMENT.

Matt. xxv. 31-46.

THE TALE OF THE WEEDS.

A farmer sowed his field with good seed-corn. But in the night-time whilst his men were asleep, his enemy came and sowed *zuwan* among the wheat and then went away.

Now when the green blades began to show, no one noticed anything wrong, but when the wheat was in the ear then the *zuwan* also became evident and his men recognized what it was. So they came to the farmer and asked him :

"Was it not good seed that you sowed in your field, Master ? Where, then, has this *zuwan* come from ?"

"An enemy has done this," said he.

"Shall we go and weed them out ?" they asked.

"No ; for whilst you are weeding you are almost sure to root up the wheat also. Let them grow side by side till harvest-time. Then I will tell the reapers to gather the *zuwan* first and bind it in bundles for burning. But the wheat they will bring into my barn."

Afterwards Jesus explained the story to his disciples.

"The farmer," said he, "who sows good seed is the Son of Man ; the field is the world ; the good seed represents the citizens of the Kingdom ; the *zuwan* represents the sons of evil ; the enemy who sowed them is the devil ; the harvest is the end of the world and the reapers are the angels.

"As weeds are gathered and burned, so will it be at the end of the world ; the Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all who are 'hindrances and wrong-doers,' and will throw them into the heaps of refuse that men burn, there they will weep and grind their teeth. But 'the good will gleam' like sunshine in the Father's granaries"

(Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43).

THIS parable may have been placed after the parable of the Sower by Matthew because of the similarity of subject ; or that may have been the reason why the two parables were spoken at the same

THE TALE OF THE WEEDS

time. It expands the thought of the "sown among thorns" of the earlier parable. Its exposition is attributed by the Evangelist to our Lord Himself.

Neither this story nor that of the Sower were calculated to exhilarate the disciples; the Master's mind sees all sides of the task, and sees it steadily. The story of the tiny Mustard-seed will afford the necessary encouragement for those who are faithful to their work.

Perhaps the most important point in the interpretation of the parable is the statement that the field is "the world." That is central to its appreciation. It is not the Christian Church, however widely or however narrowly that term may be interpreted; indeed, no such institution existed when the story was told. This is an obvious fact, but a good many expositors have left it out of account.

Again, however the "sons of the Kingdom" are interpreted, they are described as being sown "in the world," not "in the church." The Son of Man's field is not Jewry, nor the Christian Church, nor the Kingdom, but "the world." His servants have not done their duty until His seed is sown world-wide. In the field grow wheat and *zuwan*; the latter, like our English darnel and unlike our English tares, so similar in its appearance to wheat that it is only when the corn is in ear that they can be clearly distinguished.

The universalism of the parable needs to be noted because Matthew is considered by some to be so very much of a nationalist Jew (compare also xxiv.

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14; xxvi. 13; xxviii. 19). It is the world that is intended as a good place to live in, where evil is everywhere a trespassing growth, alien to the soil. This conflict moves to an appointed end; and with that God's servants are to content themselves. The harvest will come in its appointed time, and its duties are not to be anticipated or harm will result. The "bundle of life" is such a reality that we cannot isolate men, and any attempt to do so will only end in damage to the interests of God.

Beneath all appearances is a root which determines what the plant is growing to: and with that knowledge the workmen of God must be content to await the issue.

The exposition of the parable is in language which is reminiscent of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament with its quotations from Zephaniah and Daniel. It has a distinction in the words of the original (which is obscured by our English translation) between the "world" as the field of Divine activity and the end of the "age" as a synonym for harvest-time. It is also worthy of note that *zuwan* is still a common Syrian adulterant for wheat; if its seed is ground with it and eaten it causes sickness. There is a common Syrian belief that the appearance of *zuwan* or other alien growths in their fields is diabolically caused, so that our Lord may be considered to take the material of His story from popular ideas.

THE TALE OF THE WEEDS

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* If it is God's world, whence has it tares ? Does it look like God's field ? Murder, falsehood, lust, passion, folly, anguish, disease, sorrow, sin. Need we look beyond the pale of Christendom ? Need we look beyond the pale of the Church for envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness ? For insincerity, obscurantism, intolerance ?

* The story does not say there is no distinction between good and bad, but that we are not to act on the distinction to the injury of any. But is any social order possible if we do not ?

Possibly if *zuwan* could think, it might consider itself as good as the wheat ! Remember the distinction and apply it only where you are qualified—consider what is the root of your conduct, your motive—what is producing your life ?

THE DRAG-NET.

God's Kingdom is like a drag-net which is cast into the sea and encloses fish of all kinds.

When it is filled, the fishermen haul it up on the beach : then they sit down and gather the good fish into baskets, but they throw the worthless away (Matt. xiii. 47-50).

THIS story had a special appropriateness for Jesus' fishermen friends, for it is an illustration drawn from their own occupation. Luke's reference to "their partners in the other boat" (Luke v. 7 ; the whole of this story should be read as a picture of the very scene described by Jesus) reminds us that the seining-net is not an individual fisherman's equipment but requires at least two boats and their crews to handle it. The very word "seining" has come into our speech from the Greek name for this type of net—the word used in the original text of our Gospels. This class of fisherman with capital and partnership behind the enterprise was largely represented among the Twelve, and they would be quick to appreciate an illustration from their own craft.

It is a "pair" with the parable of the Weeds, but whilst that is admonitory and says, in effect, Do not try to separate prematurely the contents of the Kingdom, the instance of the Net repeats that counsel and adds an assurance that discrimination will be made and the separation effected at

THE DRAG-NET

the proper time. At the present it is not only ill-advised and perilous but also impracticable. Whilst the boats are out towing the net it is impossible to reject the worthless things which the wide sweep of the net is sure to embrace. Sensible fishermen will get on with the immediate task of casting the net and hauling it shorewards. "The business of the present hour is not to judge or to sift, but to catch fish, using a large net and giving it as wide a sweep as possible" (*Bruce*). The net will gather "of every kind." When the trawl is completed and the seining-net is in the shallows near the shore the quality of the haul will begin to appear and the fishermen will draw all up on to the beach. There it will be easy to determine what is bad and what is good.

The "net" of His teaching, the Master says, will draw into the scope of the new movement's influence men "of every kind." We cannot say much about the success of the Kingdom till the net comes to shore. Whilst the trawl is out distinctions are impossible; once the catch is landed the discerning eye of the fishermen will make a sound discrimination and all that is worthless will be thrown away. The fishermen are seeking good, marketable fish; there is a quite definite aim and purpose in it all. The ultimate distinction is the value to the Fisherman—to God. Elsewhere we may learn the qualities that constitute that value; there is no lack of description of the serviceableness which will determine our place in God's future.

Whilst the story has an implicit warning for the

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worthless, its actual and immediate warning is for the servants of God. Men may save themselves from much unprofitable speculation in which they violate the very principle that is here enforced if they will make an immediate and personal application of the parable and realize what it is *not* within their present duty to do.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

* Find the exact teaching in the Sermon on the Mount which this parable illustrates.

A Meditation for Ourselves. We all get entangled in the net of circumstance more or less. It may be one's duty to continue in the position in which one is—even if it was not originally an obligation to enter. The story in Luke v. which we have read tells us incidentally that the Master knows where His fish are and that He has to do with that net of circumstance. Life is bringing us steadily and surely to the shore. Are we of worth to the Fisherman?

The badge of the Fish was used as a secret sign among the early Christians; the world was a troubled sea, and they were glad to be in the net. Make a tale that would help a little child to understand this parable.

* Think of the "Kingdom within" and the things that will be thrown away. What will be left?

The analogy must not be pressed too far, for we are at once God's crew for the net and His fish in the net.

A PICTURE OF JUDGMENT.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and "all the angels with him," he shall sit on his glorious throne and mankind shall be gathered before him. As a shepherd separates sheep and goats, setting the sheep on his right and the goats on his left, he shall separate them.

Then shall the King say to those on the right, "Come, men made happy by my Father, come into your inheritance, the kingdom made ready from the beginning for you."

"I was hungry, you fed me ;
I was thirsty, you gave me drink ;
A stranger, you gave me a home ;
Naked, you gave me raiment ;
Ill, you cared for me ;
In prison, you came to see me."

Then the upright will say, "Sir, when did we see you hungry and fed you? Or thirsty and gave you drink? When did we see you a stranger and gave you a home? Or naked and gave you raiment? When did we see you ill, or in prison, and came to you?"

The King will say to them, "Surely, since you did it to one of these, my brothers, even the least, you did it to me."

To those on his left hand he will say, "Away, you accursed ! To the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels !"

"I was hungry, you fed me not ;
Thirsty, you gave me no drink ;
A stranger, you gave me no home ;
Naked, you gave me no raiment ;
Ill, and in prison, you never came to see me."

Then they, too, will say to him, "Sir, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or ill, or in prison and did no service for you?"

He will answer, "Surely, since you did it not to one of these, even the least, you did it not to me."

So they shall go away "these into eternal" loss, but the upright "into eternal life" (Matt. xxv. 31-46).

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ASSUMING that all the words are the words of Jesus, the first two verses are practically quoted verbatim from the Book of Enoch. Verses 35 and 36 are found in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, so far as their essential ideas are concerned; and may be paralleled from the Secrets of Enoch and the Testament of Joseph.

This whole section of Matthew contains much of parable, and the passage paraphrased above is a mingling of apocalypse and parable, containing possibly the précis of two stories, one of a Shepherd and his flock, the other of a King and his servants.

But whilst the setting and phraseology are mainly from Jewish apocalyptic literature (the final comment is from the Book of Daniel), the essential stress on the acts of omission and the King's identification of himself with his brethren are without a parallel. The whole passage reads like a parable with verse 45 as its moral.

We take it as a pictorial illustration of the Divine principle by which the wheat and tares are discriminated. It is an unfolding of spiritual laws, rather than an unveiling of future matters of eschatological interest.

The principle runs through many of the parables whose main lesson is in another connection. It is in harmony not only with the Tares and the Drag-net, but also with the Unmerciful Servant, the Wedding Garment, the Vineyard Labourers, the Ten Virgins and the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants.

Divine judgment is depicted as going on at this present time; our acts are being weighed in the

A PICTURE OF JUDGMENT

Divine balances and esteemed or condemned according to the principle announced. There is one rule, and one only, by which the Kingdom is governed and our relation to that rule determines our relation to the Kingdom of Right Relations, the Kingdom of the Heavens, the Kingdom of God. There is no attempt to audit a man's Book of Life, prepared with careful debit and credit entries. Christian duties and Christian hearts will be known and recognized "by their fruits." And the distinctive mark of the Christian will be his deeds that show his relationship—a goodness that has his Father's quality and mark (Matt. v. 48). That quality is a self-forgetful love expressed in active kindnesses, so self-forgetful that it does not recognize itself when it is described by the King. Something more than good-nature and geniality, it addresses itself to the mitigation of evil and the relief of the troubles of others, doing this not merely casually and in expansive moments but in every direction where life affords opportunity. This is Christ's final discovery of the Kingdom whose banner and badge is Love.

Helps to Meditation or Discussion.

Read the First Epistle of John.

The soul's garden must not only be free of weeds, it must have much fruit. Read John xv.

There may not always be a place in some great scheme, but there is always scope for "unto one of these least." The value of the service is not in its object but in its spirit.

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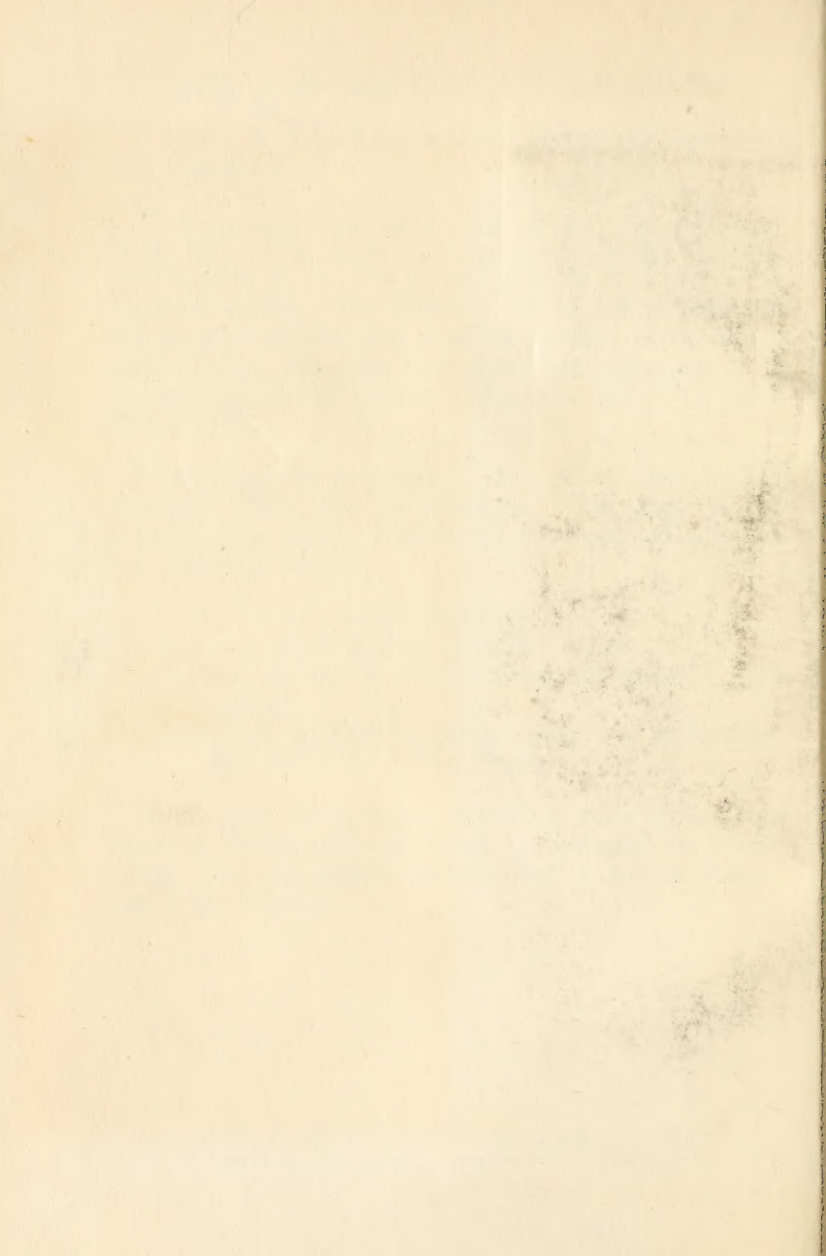
* Read J. R. Lowell's *The Present Crisis*, and relate it to this Judgment.

* "Something more than good nature and geniality." Well, then, what more? Courtesy, a winning manner, good temper, tact? A man may have all these and yet be absolutely selfish. The Christian has to add to these the self-forgetful, self-denying deeds of service. (Cf. yet once again, 1 Cor. xiii.—the Love that does everything is in this great picture of Judgment the Love that thinks it has done nothing.)

* The Kingdom is prepared. It is God's plan for His universe. These are its inheritors. The terms of the inheritance are clear. Discuss this in connection with the two following excerpts :

"Jesu Christ of heaven
In a poor man's apparel pursueth us ever . . .
For on Calvary of Christ's blood Christendom 'gan
spring,
And blood-brethren we became there . . . and gentle-
men each one."—*Piers Plowman*.

"Only upon the principles for which Jesus of Nazareth stands in history can the world be fashioned to heart's desire. For the world's problem lies in lack of fellowship."—*N. Micklem*.



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